SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

VOLUME 8 **THE DEATH SIGN OF SPRING**

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

首斬り朝

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

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Punished is not the man himself,
but the evil that resides in him.

story
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THE DEATH SIGN OF SPRING

by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

8

A NOTE TO READERS

Samurai Executioner is a carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER 首斬り朝

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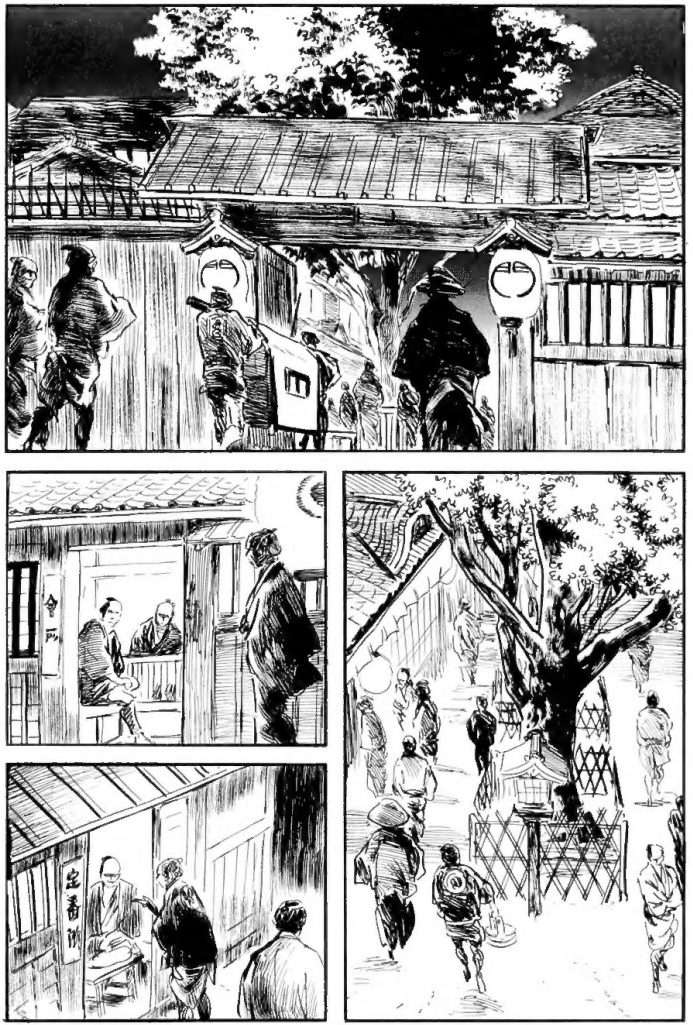
Pock-marks



EDO-MACHI NI-CHOME IN THE YOSHIWARA. THE DAIHYŌGOYA GEISHA HOUSE.

THE INCIDENT BEGAN IN THE SECOND HOUR OF THE DOG.

DIE, YATSUHASHI!!

GYAHAHH--!

DHHHH!!
AIEEEE!!
CURSE YOU!
CURSE YOU!
SHOKK
CHOKK
CURSE YOU!!
YOU TRICKED ME GOOD, DIDN'T YOU! DIDN'T YOU?!
SHRK
SHRK
SHRRK
AM I?! AM I SO GODDAMN UGLY?!

SO UGLY I GIVE YOU THE CHILLS?!
AWAP
AWAP
HAH!
THE POX MONSTER, AM I? THAT WAS LOW, GIRL.

YEAH, I'M UGLY. AND YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL.
BUT, BUT...
BEAUTY ISN'T THE FACE, IT'S THE HEART. AND SO? WHO'S UGLY NOW?
AND EVEN IF I DIDN'T CUT YOU, TIME WOULD'VE IT MAKES EVERYONE UGLY, ESPECIALLY WOMEN.
CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?!

THAM
THAM
THAM
FAPP
SCHOKK
SKRSSH

KLUMP
AWMP
WRESTLE HIM DOWN! GET THE DAMN SWORD!
THWAM
THWAM
THWAM

HYAA!
ME?! YOU'RE TAKING ME?!
KSHOKK
SKRESSH
GHRF!
NGYAHHH!
KYAHH!
MAKE A LAUGHING STOCK OF ME?!
WAHH!!
SKUSHI
NNUYAAH
SKSSST
YOU BASSUDS!!

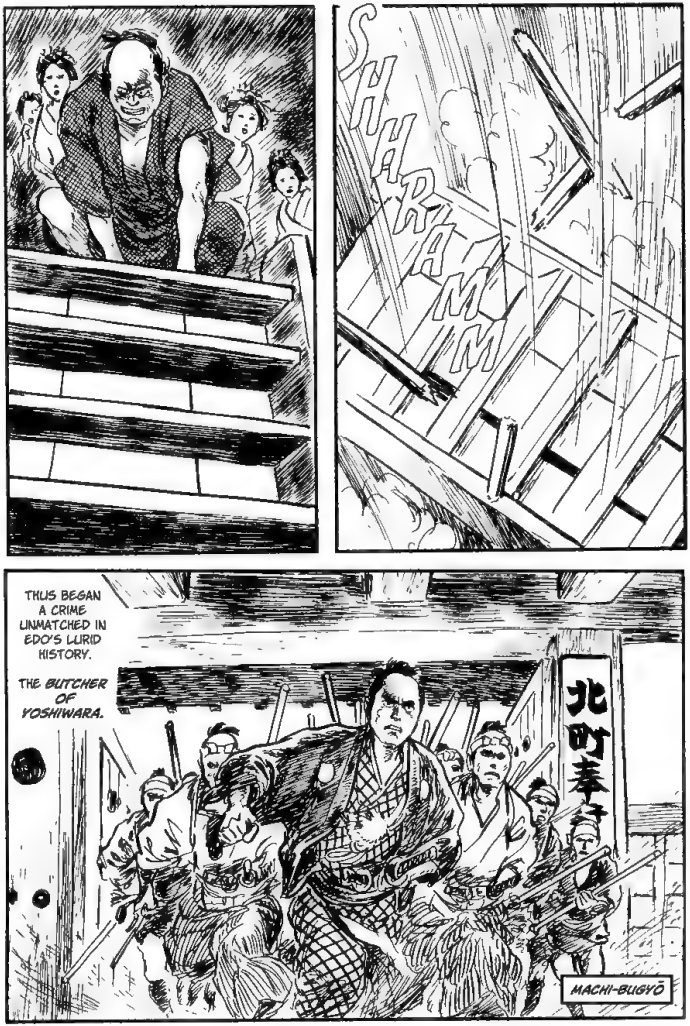
HEEEK!!
NOHHH!

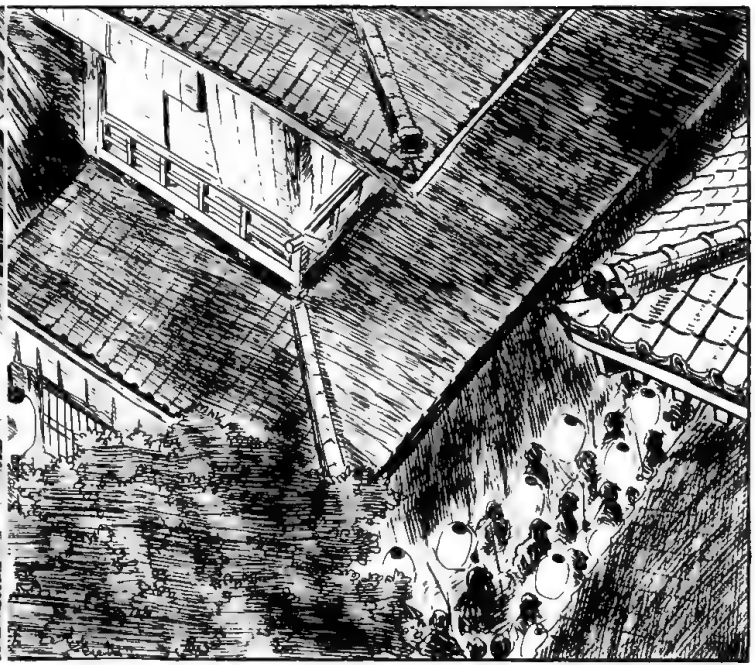
KYAAHH!!
YAHHHH!

YOU BITCHES, TOO! YOU KNEW ABOUT YATSUKASHI!

TRICKING ME...!
HAIIEE!!
GYAA!
LYING TO ME!
AIIEEE!!
NNGAHH!

SKRASSH
HRRGK!
SPLLSSH
HAIIEEE!


SHARAM
THUS BEGAN A CRIME UNMATCHED IN EDO'S LURID HISTORY.
THE BUTCHER OF YOSHIWARA.
北町奉
MACHI-BUGYŌ



THAT--THAT BASTARD! HE'S HOLED UP ON THE SECOND FLOOR!

HE'S GOT SEVEN OF MY GIRLS UP THERE...

HRN!
TAKE HIM!!
HYAIIE!!

御用
御用
御用

SANOYA JIROBEI,
A LABOR BROKER FROM
ODAWARA-CHO, WAS FORTY-
SEVEN—AT THE HEIGHT
OF HIS MANHOOD.

SKUSSH
HAUUGHHH!
MONSTER! YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR!
SEIZE HIM!!

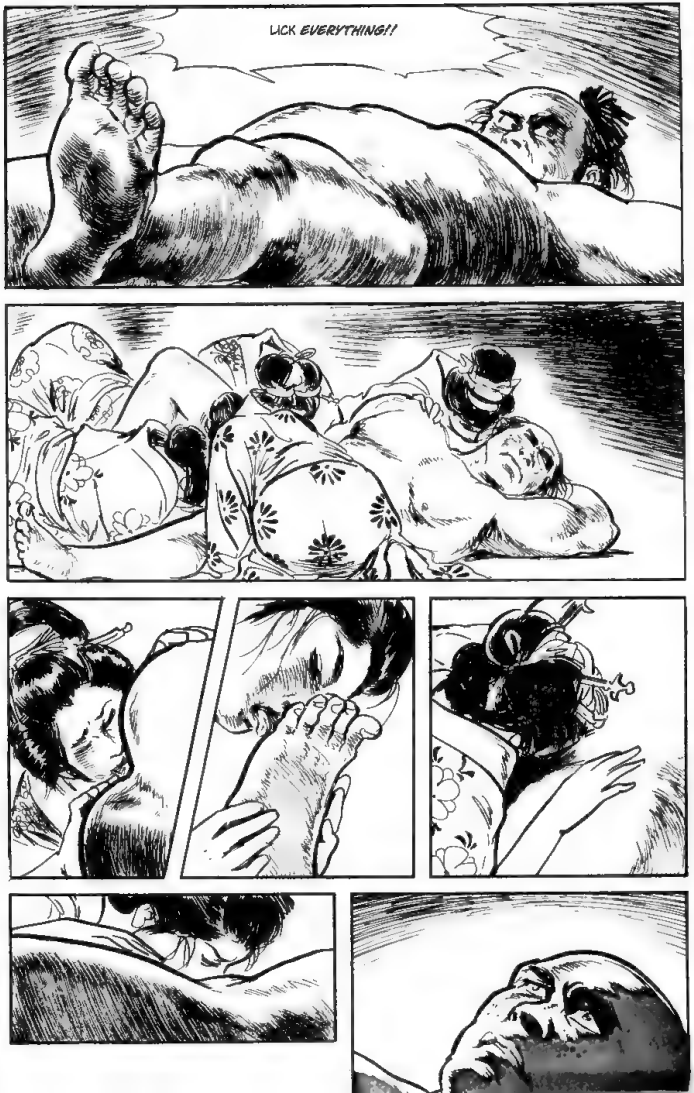
I'LL SKEWER THE OTHER SIX!!
HEH HEH HEH...
HIS FACE DISFIGURED BY DISEASE, HE'D NEVER FOUND A WIFE. HIS TERRIBLE POCKMARKS EARNED HIM THE NICKNAME *POXY JIROBEI*.
RUMOR HAD IT HE'D BEEN A *RONIN* IN WEST JAPAN. HIS SWORDWORK WAS SHOCKINGLY GOOD, EACH VICTIM CUT DOWN WITH A SINGLE STROKE.

I'M BRINGING YOU IN!!
SIR, SIR. STOP! HE'S GOT MY BEST STOCK UP THERE.
MY PRECIOUS WHORES!
GRNN...
SHUKK

EEK!
KYAH!
HEEK!
THINK I'M SO *UGLY* ?!
UGLY ENOUGH YOU GET THE *CHILLS* ?!

AM I UGLY NI!
SCHOKK
NNGK
AAY!

UGLIER'N THIS?!
BEAUTIFUL?! UGLY?! JUST SKIN APART!
AND YET YOU... YOU...
...ALL OF YOU...
LICK MY UGLY FACE!
LICK MY FILTHY FEET! MY ASSHOLE, DAMMIT! AND MY COCK!

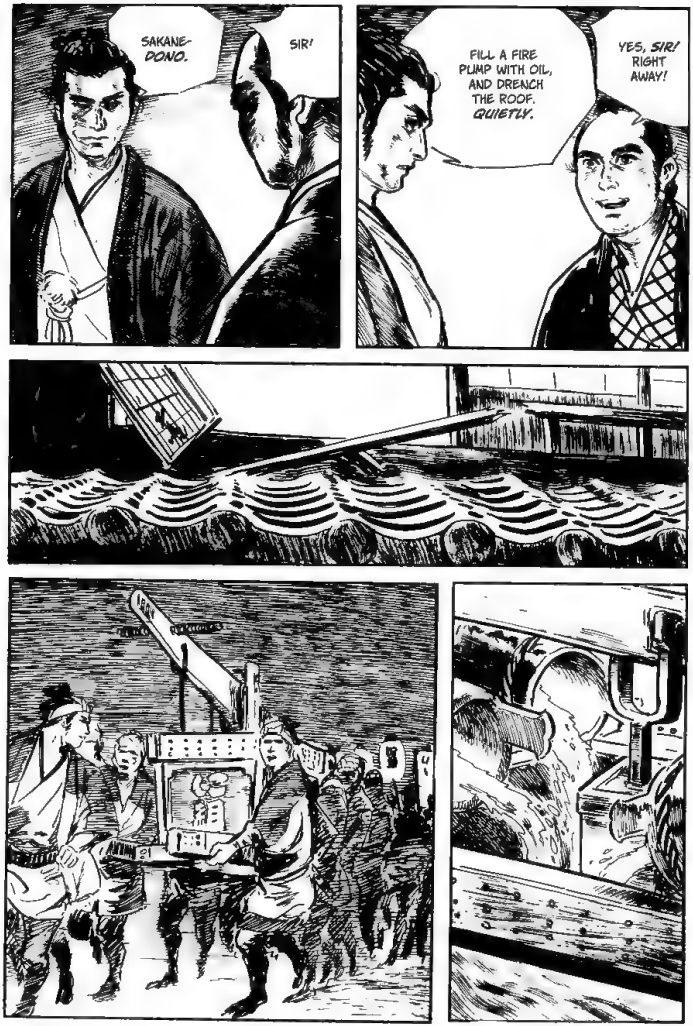

LICK EVERYTHING!!

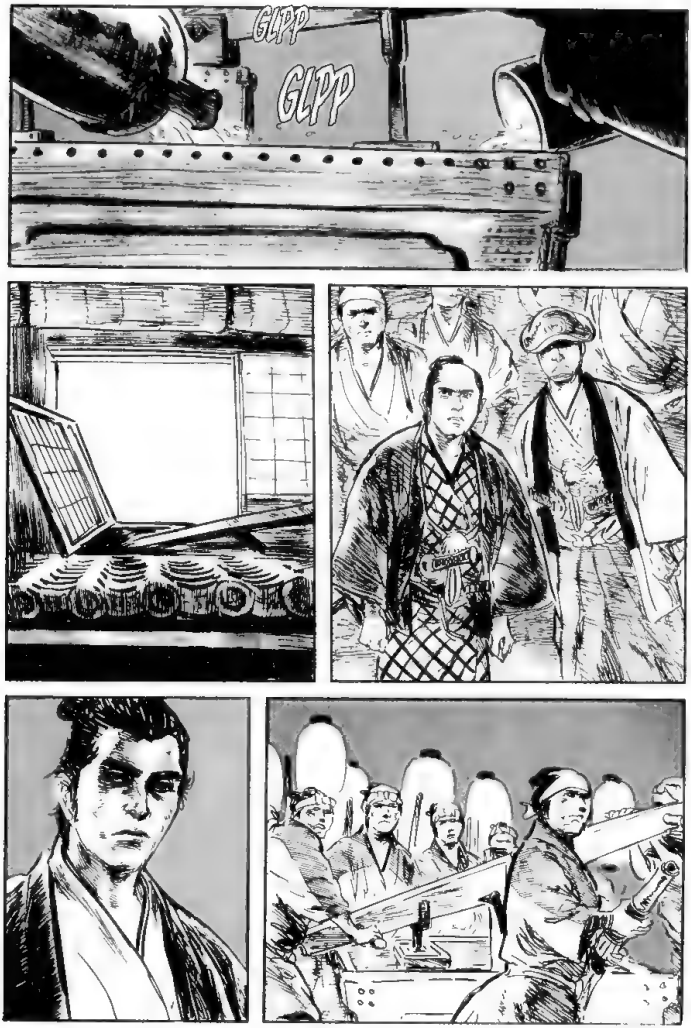
DAMN YOU, YATSUHASHI...
I, I GAVE HER 200 RYO JUST YESTERDAY. SAID HER MOM WAS DYING, NEEDED MEDICINE, THE LIAR!
SO TODAY I CAME EARLY. HID IN A CLOSET.
NOT TO HURT HER. JUST SURPRISE HER. STUPID KID'S TRICK, A GUY MY AGE...

SURE SHE HAD OTHER GUYS. SHE WAS A WHORE. IF A GAL'S GOT A LOVER, GUESS SHE'D GIVE HIM THE MONEY.
I CAN LIVE WITH THAT! I CAN DEAL! I KNOW I'M UGLY. I PAID HER TO SEE ME. BUT...
THE POX MON-STER'LL BE HERE SOON.
AFTER THAT FREAK LEAVES, WE'LL DO IT RIGHT...
WHILE SHE SENT OFF LOVERBOY, I SNUCK DOWN AND GOT MY SWORD.
THE FIRST LOVE OF JIROBEI'S LIFE. BUT HE'D PICKED A BAD ONE. AND THE OTHER GIRLS HELPED, MOCKING HIM IN THE SHADOWS. SORROW AND FURY, A FATAL COMBINATION...
D--DAMN IT ALL...

HRMM...

YAMADA-SAMA!
HOHH!!
THE TOWN OFFICE FILLED ME IN.
WE CAN'T MAKE A MOVE WITH ALL THOSE HOSTAGES
ANY IDEAS AT ALL...?

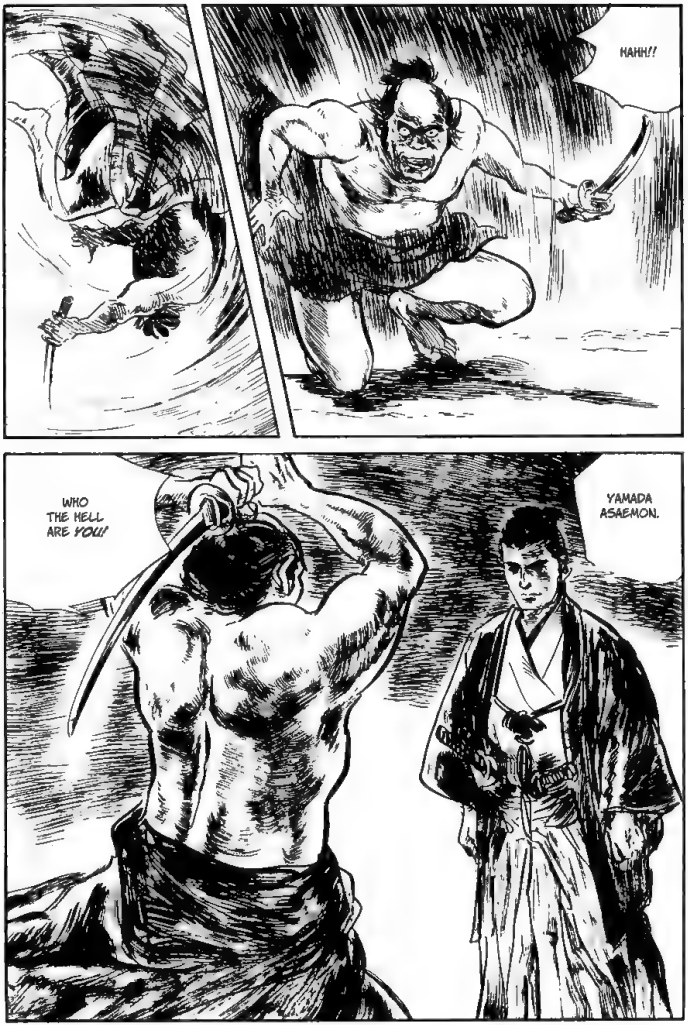

SAKANE-DONO.
SIR!
FILL A FIRE PUMP WITH OIL, AND DRENCH THE ROOF. QUIETLY.
YES, SIR! RIGHT AWAY!


GLPP
GLPP

KSHAK
KREEK
KREEK
FHSST
FHUST

A WORD WITH FOX-DONO!
WH--WHAT?!
WHAT'D YOU CALL ME?!

I SAID POX-DONO.
WHY YOU--!!
SHRP
RAING!

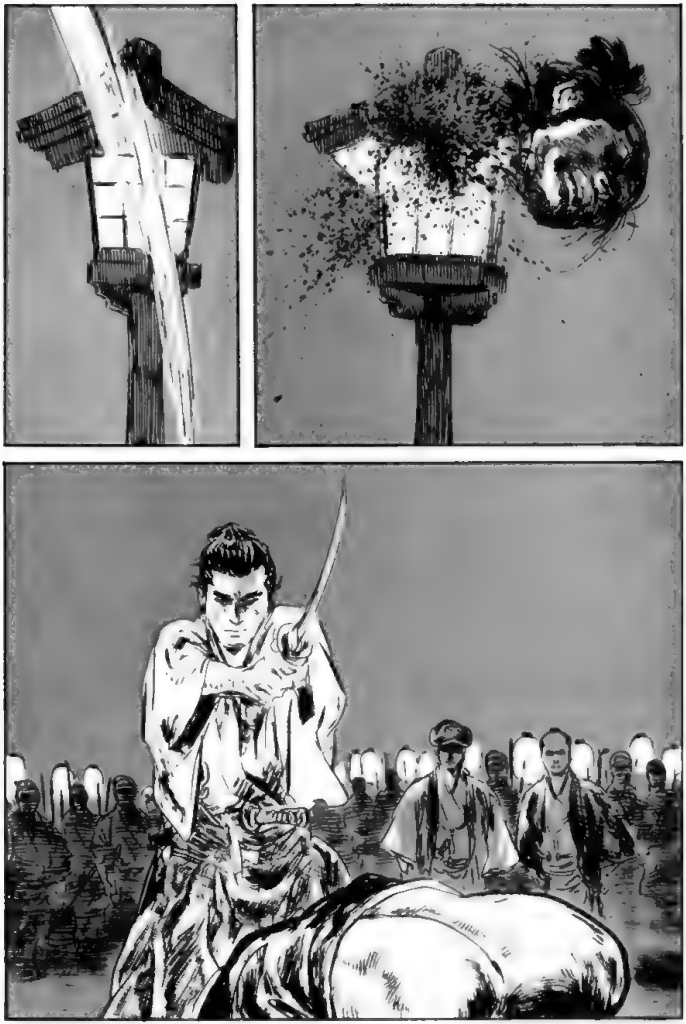

HAHH!!
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU!
YAMADA ASAEMON.

YOU?
YOU'RE KUBIKIRI ASA?
YOU, A BUSHI?! MOCKING MY SCARS?!
SCORNING A PESON FOR HIS LOOKS?!

HAS THE *FOX* REACHED YOUR *HEART?*
A *BUSHI* IS ANGRY WHEN CALLED A *COWARD.*
ONLY AN *ACTOR* WHINES ABOUT HIS FACE.

KSHAK
SHRUKK
NO...
NO EXCUSE...

...NONE...
I'LL BE YOUR SECOND!
MY... MY THANKS...
PATHETIC. TO MAKE SUCH MOCKERY...



the thirty-fifth

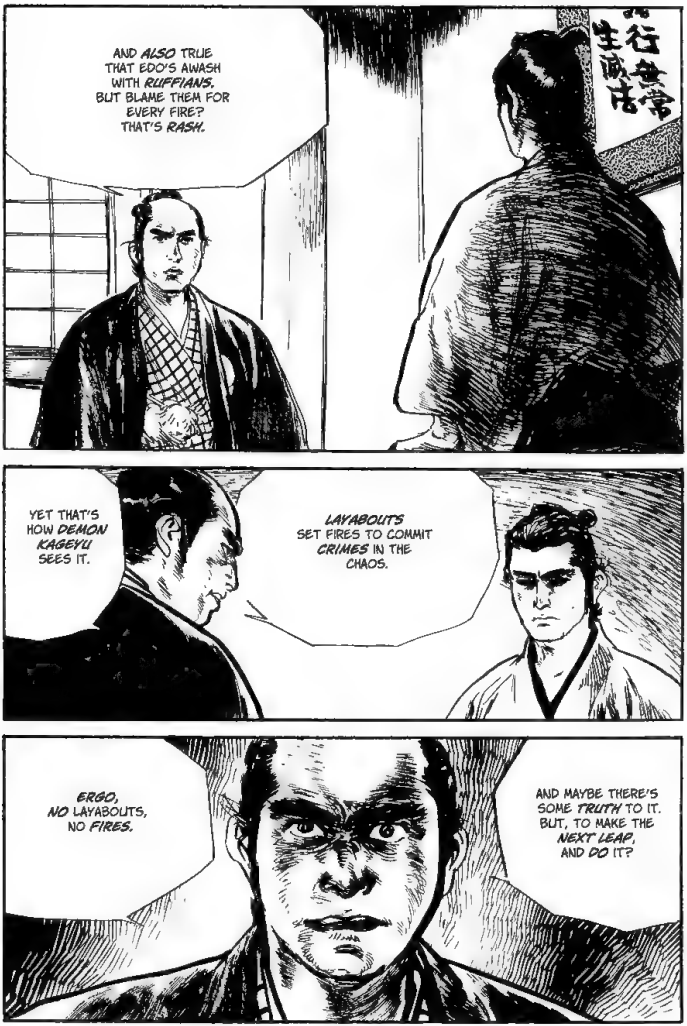
Demon Kageyu

SPRK
AHHPP
KSHAKK
SHRAKK

KRRASHH
BASH
KK
RACK
GSHAK

ALL MY LIFE, I'VE *BELIEVED!* DEEP IN *FAITH!* *TRUSTING* IN BUDDHA'S *COMPASSION.* BUT FROM THIS DAY FORTH, CALL ME *DEMON!*

I SHALL BE A DEMON OF THE LAW! CRUSHING THE VERMIN PLAGUING EDO!
THAT'S THE KIND OF MAN HE IS.
NAKAYAMA KAGEYU-SAMA, THE NEW HITSUKE TOZOKU-ARATAME-YAKU. PROMOTED FROM THE O-SAKITE-GUMI.
THERE'S BEEN AT LEAST ONE FIRE EVERY TEN DAYS IN THE FUNAI.
諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂
TOO MANY, TRUE.


諸行無常
生滅法
AND *ALSO* TRUE THAT EDO'S AWASH WITH *RUFFIANS*, BUT BLAME THEM FOR EVERY FIRE? THAT'S *RASH*.
YET THAT'S HOW *DEMON KAGEYU* SEES IT.
LAYABOUTS SET FIRES TO COMMIT *CRIMES* IN THE CHAOS.
ERGO, *NO* LAYABOUTS, NO *FIRES*.
AND MAYBE THERE'S SOME *TRUTH* TO IT. BUT, TO MAKE THE *NEXT LEAP*, AND *DO* IT?

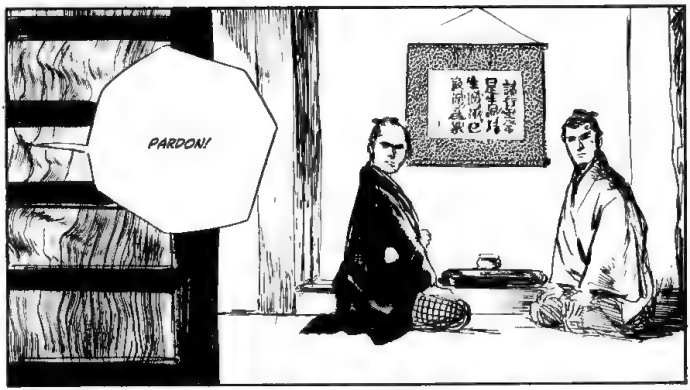
HE'S *REALLY KILLING* THEM. *ANYONE* WHO RESISTS OR RUNS.
THAT'S ABOVE THE COURTS *AND* THE LAW
YES, THE *KATO-ARATAME'S* JOB IS TO STOP ARSON AND VIOLENT CRIME.
AND *I'M* NOT SAYING DON'T *ARREST* THEM!

BUT CUT THEM DOWN? NO TRIALS? IT'S CRAZY!
IF EDO'S CRAWLING WITH DRIFTERS AND GAMBLERS, I SAY IT'S A FAILURE OF GOVERNANCE!
EVEN THEY'VE GOT A RIGHT TO LIFE. THEY'RE NOT ALL THE SAME.
SO HOW THEM DOWN? INNOCENT OR NO...?

TOK
IT REFLECTS BADLY ON THE *SHOGUN.*
THERE'S *MORE.*
THEY'RE *TORTURING* THEM. *EBIZUME!*
DEMON KAGEYU INVENTED IT.
TIES THEIR HANDS BEHIND THEIR BACKS. SITS THEM CROSS-LEGGED, BINDS THEIR *ANKLES.*
THEN HE YANKS THE ROPE IN BACK, AND LOOPS IT AROUND THEIR *SHINS.*

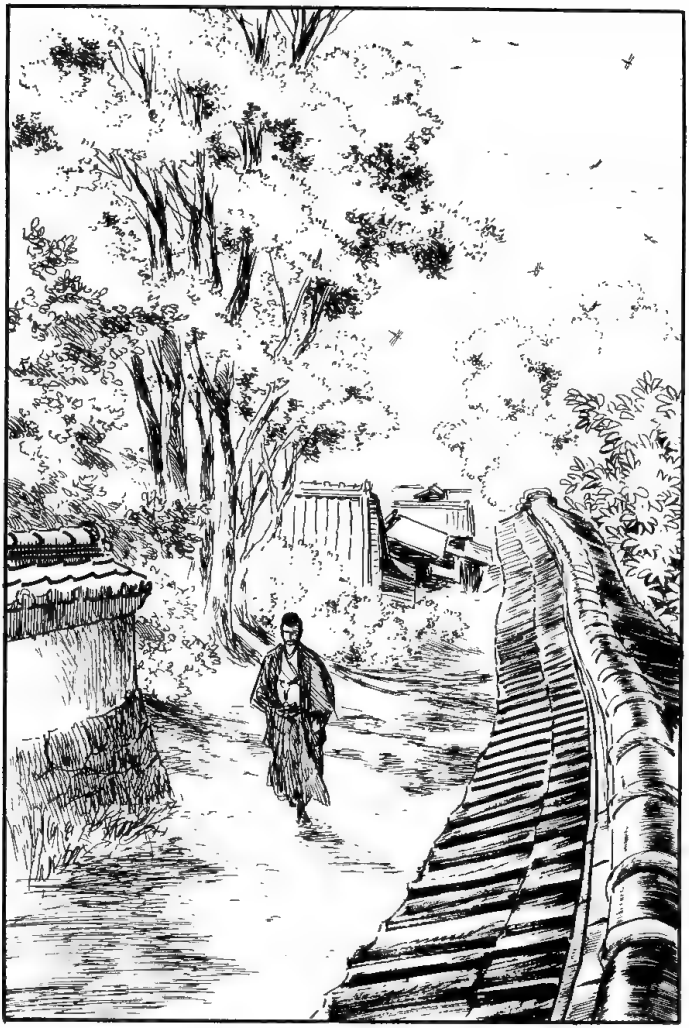
JUST LIKE... THIS...
LIKE, UNGH! SHRIMP.
AND HE LEAVES THEM LIKE THAT.
HALF A DAY, ALL DAY.
HALF KILLS THEM.
AND THEN HE INTERROGATES.
JHF HAHF
DO THAT TO A GUY, HE'LL CONFESS TO ANYTHING!

IF WE DON'T *DO* SOMETHING, INNOCENT PEOPLE WILL PAY.
THE *O-BUGYO-SAMA* HAS A SOFT SPOT FOR HIM. BUT IF *YAMADA-SAMA* REASONED WITH HIM...


PARDON!

I AM KONDO ICHITARO, *DOSHIN* IN THE SERVICE OF NAKAYAMA-*SAMA!*

TO PAY HIS RESPECTS UPON BECOMING KATO-ARATAME...
...OUR COMMANDER HAS PREPARED A SMALL BANQUET. HE DESIRES YAMADA-SAMA ATTEND.
PAY HIS RESPECTS? NOT DAMN LIKELY...
I SHOULD BE PLEASED.

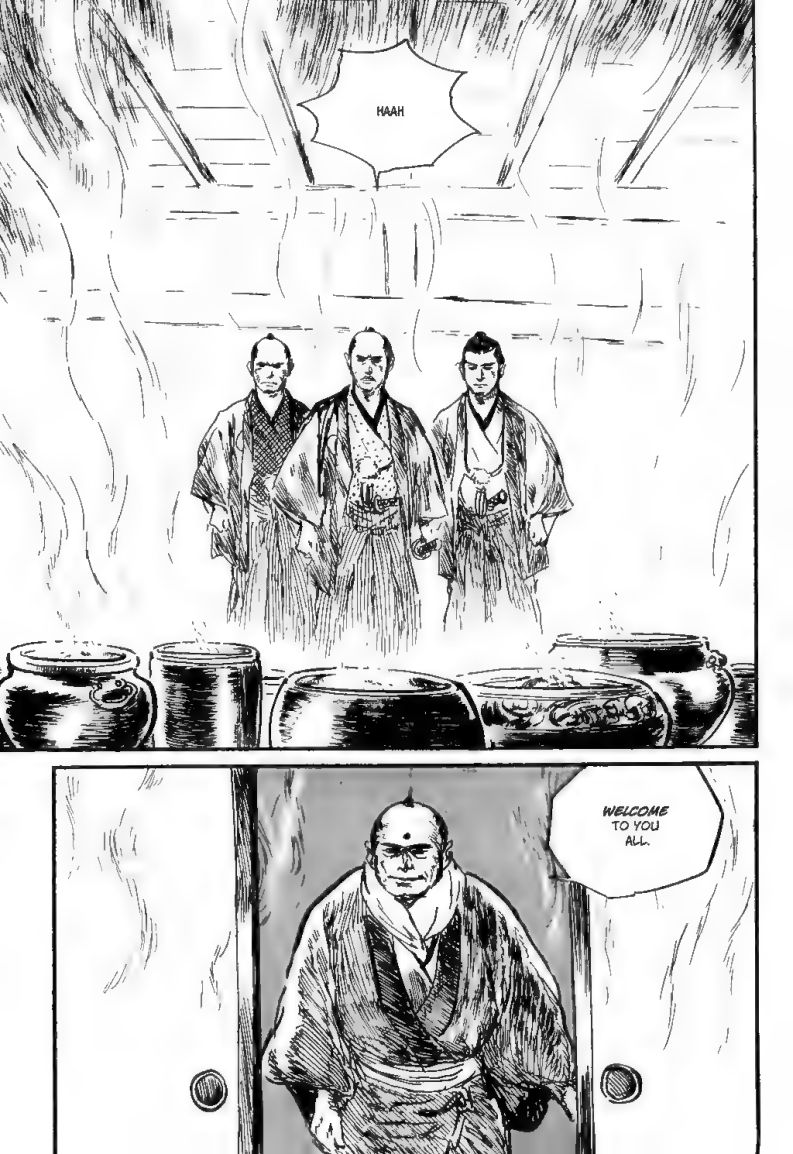


PLEASE WAIT HERE.
WHY, YAMADA-SAMA!

IT SEEMS WE'RE THE ONLY GUESTS.
NAKAYAMA-*SAMA* WAS APPOINTED A MONTH AGO. IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO DO THIS *NOW*.
ANY IDEA *WHY*, YAMADA-*SAMA*?
NONE AT ALL.
ALL IS READY. PLEASE.

KONDO-DONO, WAS IT? YOU'VE WORKED UP A SWEAT.
YOU HAVE. ODD. IT'S NOT THAT HOT?
WELL, UHM, YES, SIR...
THIS WAY, PLEASE.

SHKK
HAHN?!


HAAH
WELCOME
TO YOU
ALL.

DON'T BE SHY! SIT BY THE FIRE.
SO COLD OUT TODAY. CHILLS THE BONES.
I'M ALL BUNDLED UP!
BWAHH HAH HAH HAH!

THANK YOU FOR COMING! I KNOW YOU'RE BUSY MEN.
I'VE BEEN SO BUSY MYSELF THERE'S BEEN NO TIME FOR COURTESY CALLS.
GENTLEMEN! GOOD TO WORK WITH YOU!
PLEASURE'S OURS.
MUTUAL!!

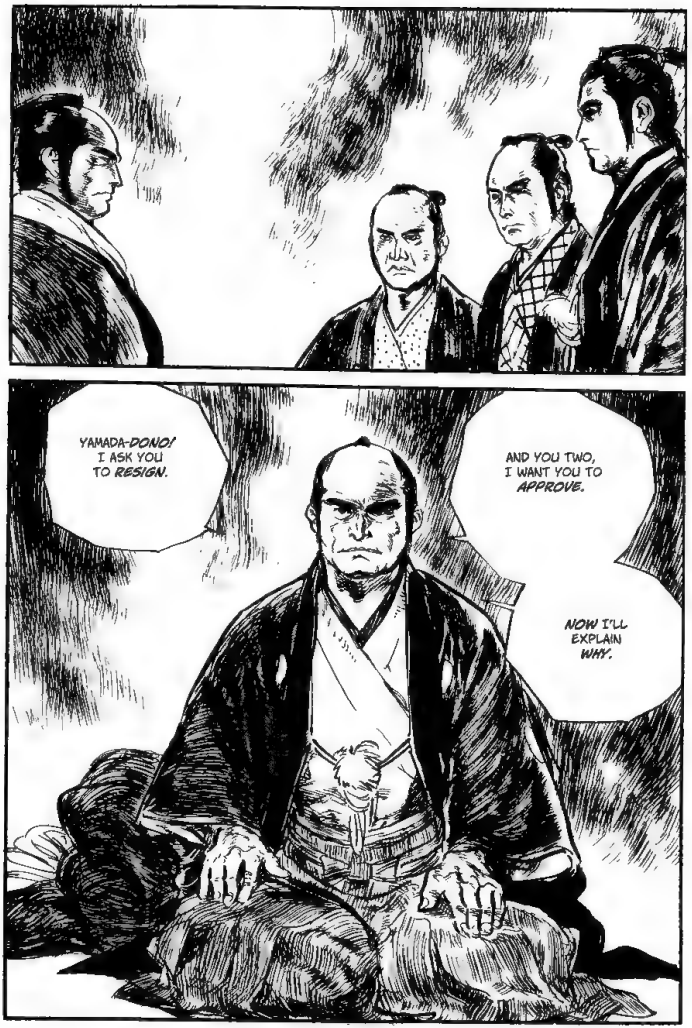
ENOUGH WITH FORMALITIES! SAMPLE THE NAKAYAMA FAMILY RECIPE!
KLAPP
KLAPP
KITHUNK

PSSSSSH

EAT IT WHILE IT'S *HOT!*
GOT A *COLLD* NIGHT AHEAD!
THAM
NAKAYAMA-*SAMA!* I'M *NOT* AMUSED!
IT MAY BE AUTUMN, BUT THE SUMMER HEAT *LINGERS!* TO KINDLE *HIBACHI!* AND FEED US *BOILING UDON!*

I DEMAND AN EXPLANATION!
BWAHH HAH HAH! GYAHH HAH HAH!
YOUR NEW KATO-ARATAME IS A MAN WHO GLADLY TURNS THINGS ON THEIR HEAD!
DAY TO NIGHT! NIGHT TO DAY! SUMMER TO WINTER, WINTER TO SUMMER. IN SUMMER HE PUTS UP FUSAMA, LIGHTS HIBACHI. WEARS WINTER CLOTHES AND EATS HOT UDON.

IN WINTER HE FLINGS WIDE THE DOORS, WATERS DOWN THE GARDEN, WEARS THIN COTTON. FANS HIMSELF, AND FEASTS ON COLD WATER AND CHILLED NOODLES.
AND TO DO HIS DUTY, HE'LL BREAK ALL THE RULES!
I'VE STAGED THIS LITTLE PERFORMANCE TO PROVE MY RESOLUTION
I INTEND TO BE AS SAVAGE AND MERCILESS AS A DEMON! MURAKAMI-DONO, TAMIYA-DONO, CHIEF YORIKI FOR THE NORTH AND SOUTH MACHI-BUGYO. AND YAMADA -DONO! I ASK YOUR HELP.


YAMADA-DONO! I ASK YOU TO RESIGN.
AND YOU TWO, I WANT YOU TO APPROVE.
NOW I'LL EXPLAIN WHY.

WE FACE A SOARING CRIME RATE. WE CAN'T CONTOL A TENTH OF IT! THIS IS FACT.
AS YOU KNOW, EDO'S POPULATION HAS TOPPED 1.2 MILLION.
AND WE JITTEMON NUMBER LESS THAN A THOUSAND! NO WONDER WE FAIL. THERE'S NO MAGIC SOLUTION.

AND THAT IS WHY I'VE BECOME A DEMON.
AWPP
THE DEMON COMETH! AH, THE TERROR!

THE HORROR OF HIS PASSING!
THIS ROAD IS THE DEMON'S ROAD.
THAM
THAM
THIS TOWN IS THE DEMON'S TOWN.

WORK WHILE THE DEMON'S AWAY!
SLEEP BEFORE HE COMES!
LET SLEEPING DEMONS LIE!
QUIET IS THE NIGHT IN EDO!

YAMADA-DONO, KUBIKIRI-ASA!
A BLIGHT ON HAPPY OCCASIONS.
WHERE YOU PASS, PEOPLE FLEE, CURSE YOU LIKE DEATH ITSELF.
SOME SAY "GOD OF DEATH"...

THEY BEG YOU TO STAY AWAY.
THAT'S WHAT I WANT.
THAT ROLE.
I WANT TO MAKE MY NAME REVERBERATE THROUGH THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-EIGHT NEIGHBORHOODS OF EDO.
CURSE DEMON KAGEYU INSTEAD! LET ALL EDO FEAR ME!
KLAPP
KLAPP

鬼
鬼
鬼
鬼
鬼
THERE IS BUT ONE YAMADA ASAEMON. BUT AS YOU SEE, I CAN MAKE A *HUNDRED* DEMONS!

DEMON KAGEYU. ONE, AND A HUNDRED.
BEHEADING THE CONDEMNED! SALLYING FORTH TO CUT DOWN THE LAWLESS. A HUNDRED DEMONS, EVERY NIGHT, EVERY DAY, ACROSS EDO.
THAT'LL DETER CRIME, DON'T YOU THINK?
HRMM... I...
... SEE.
AND THUS, TO SPREAD THE NAME OF DEMON KAGEYU, MAKE ME EXECUTIONER.
HOW ABOUT IT YAMADA-DONO ?!

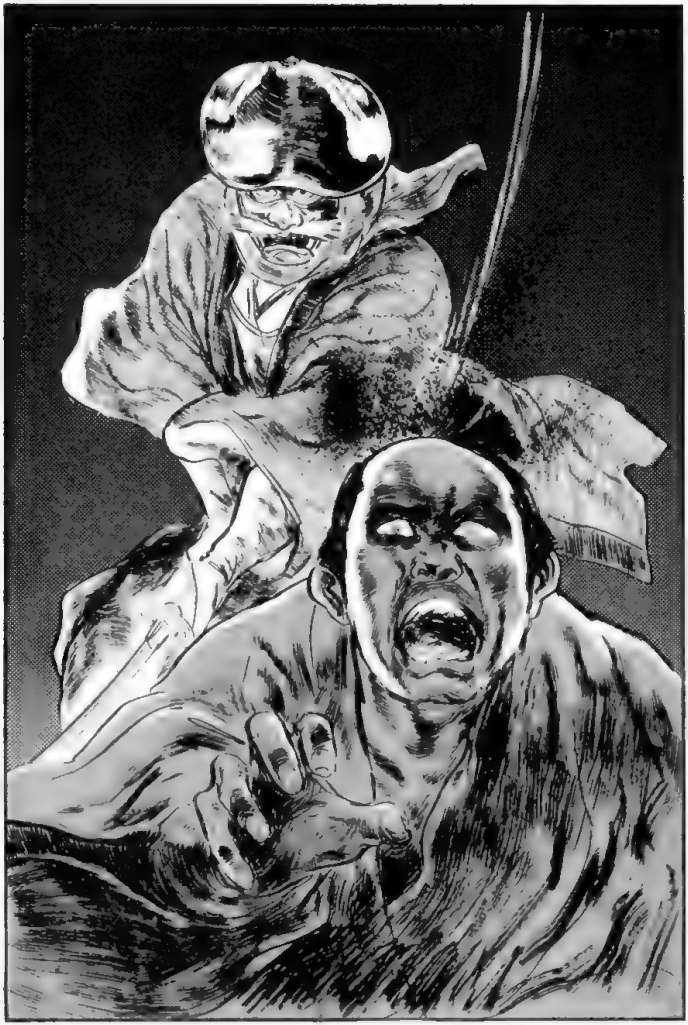
I TEST THE SHOGUN'S SWORDS.
THE BUGYO ORDER EXECUTIONS.
IF THEY AGREE...
I THANK YOU.
SO, GENTLEMEN. I ASK YOU...
WE MUST ASK THE BUGYO FIRST...
THEN TELL THEM ONE MORE THING. I ONLY KILL THE WICKED TO RAISE THE NAME OF DEMON KAGEYU. A LESSER EVIL FOR THE GREATER GOOD. FORGIVE ME.
NAKAYAMA-DONO.

KOMPAKU KI NI SHITE
ONI NO YU TO NARAN
YOU KNOW THE POEM?
FROM QU YUAN'S NINE SONGS?
YES. QU YUAN KNEW BOTH DEMON AND GOD LIVED WITHIN US, BUT HIS WILL STILL LED HIM TO ACT AGAINST NATURE'S FLOW. HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO CAST HIMSELF INTO THE MILOU RIVER.
THE DEMON IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT HE SEEMS.
I AM PREPARED.

SKASSH

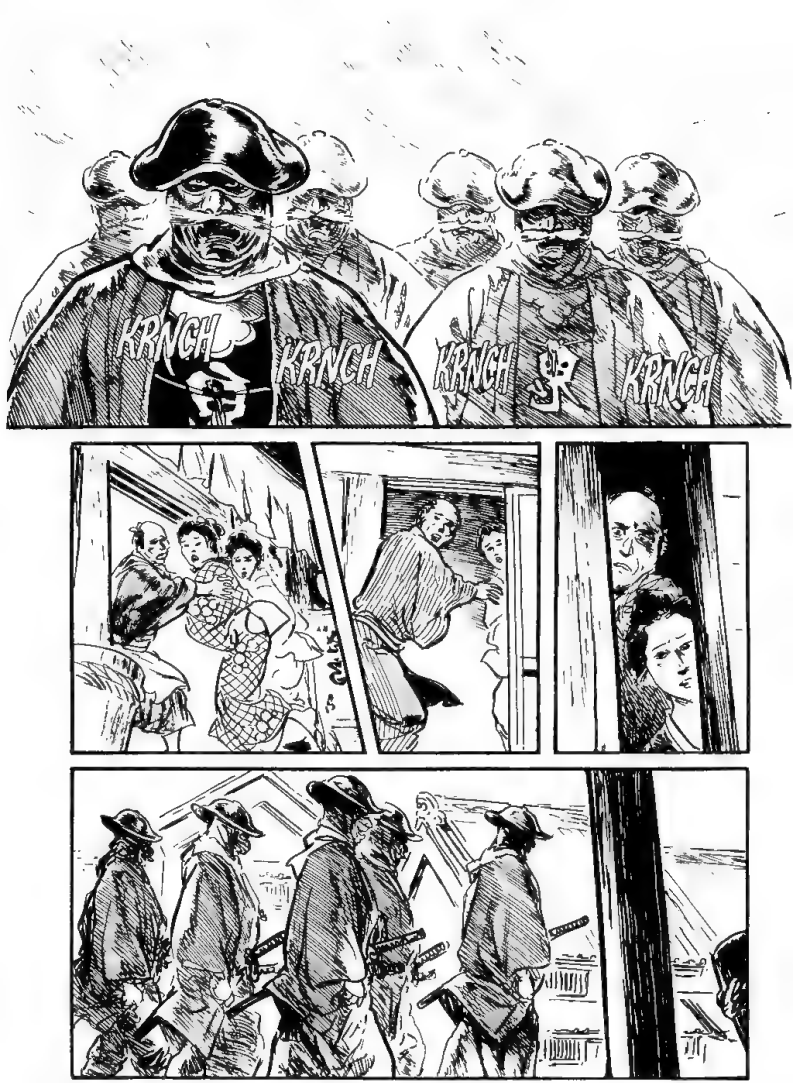
AND SO...
DEMON KAGEYU APPEARS ACROSS EDO!

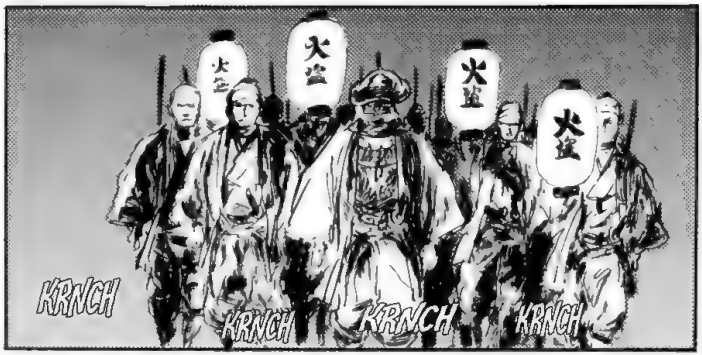
AND
FURTHER...



火盗
火盗
火盗

AIEEE!!


KRNCH
KRNCH
KRNCH
KRNCH


KRNCH
KRNCH
KRNCH
KRNCH

YOU'RE FINE WITH THIS, YAMADA-DONO ?!

YES, THE CRIME RATE'S PLUNGED UNDER DEMON KAGEYU. FIRES, TOO. JUST ONE THIS MONTH.
BUT TWENTY PEOPLE *DEAD*. MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED *TORTURED*. ALMOST *ALL* FOR TINY INFRACTIONS WE'D NORMALLY IGNORE...
AND WHO *KNOWS* HOW MANY *INNOCENTS* ?!
I HEAR THE *BAKUFU'S* PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS.
THERE'S A RUMOR THEY'RE RAISING HIS *STIPEND*.

GYAHH
HAH
HAH
HAHH!
YAMADA-*SAMA*, IS THIS *RIGHT?!* DO PEOPLE'S LIVES MATTER SO *LITTLE?*
CAN THEY BE CRUSHED LIKE *INSECTS* IN THE NAME OF *PREVENTION?* LIVES *STOLEN* FOR A "GREATER GOOD"?
YOU SAY IT *YOURSELF.* SENTENCING ISN'T *RETRIBUTION.*
IT'S TO MAKE THE OFFENDER SEE THE ERROR OF HIS WAYS. *FIRST* BLAME LIES WITH THE *ENVIRONMENT* HE GREW UP IN, SOMETIMES WITH *GOVERNMENT ITSELF.*

I BELIEVE THAT, TOO. BUT DEMON KAGEYU IS COMPLETELY THE OPPOSITE!
WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
WE JITTE-MONO, WE'VE...
...WE'VE LOST OUR WAY.
THE ANSWER WILL COME CLEAR. BUT I FEAR NAKAYAMA-DONO MUST FIND IT FOR HIMSELF.
I PRAY IT WON'T COME TO THAT...
?!

DAMN THAT DEMON KAGEYU!
HE DID THE BOSS! WE GOTTA GET HIM.
DAMN STRAIGHT!
GUYS. I GOT AN IDEA.

WHISPER WHISPER

火盗
HIYYAHH!!

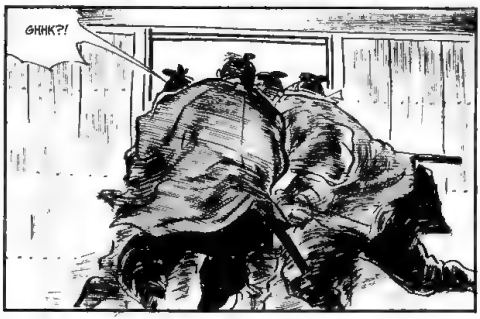
TAKE THAT!!
KRAKK!
GYAHH!!
NO YOU—!!
FWHAM
SPRAKK!
GET 'IM!
HNGN!
DIE!!
DAMN!!

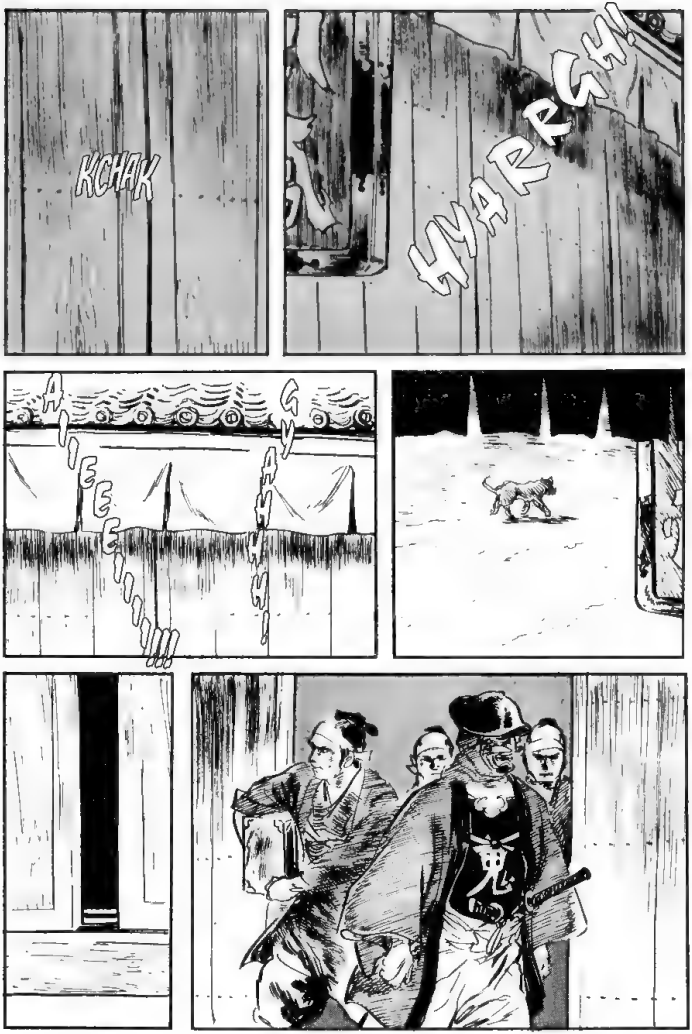
HEH HEH! HOW DO I LOOK?
HEH HEH HEH HEH.
BWAHH HAH HAH!
火盗

THAM THAM THAM

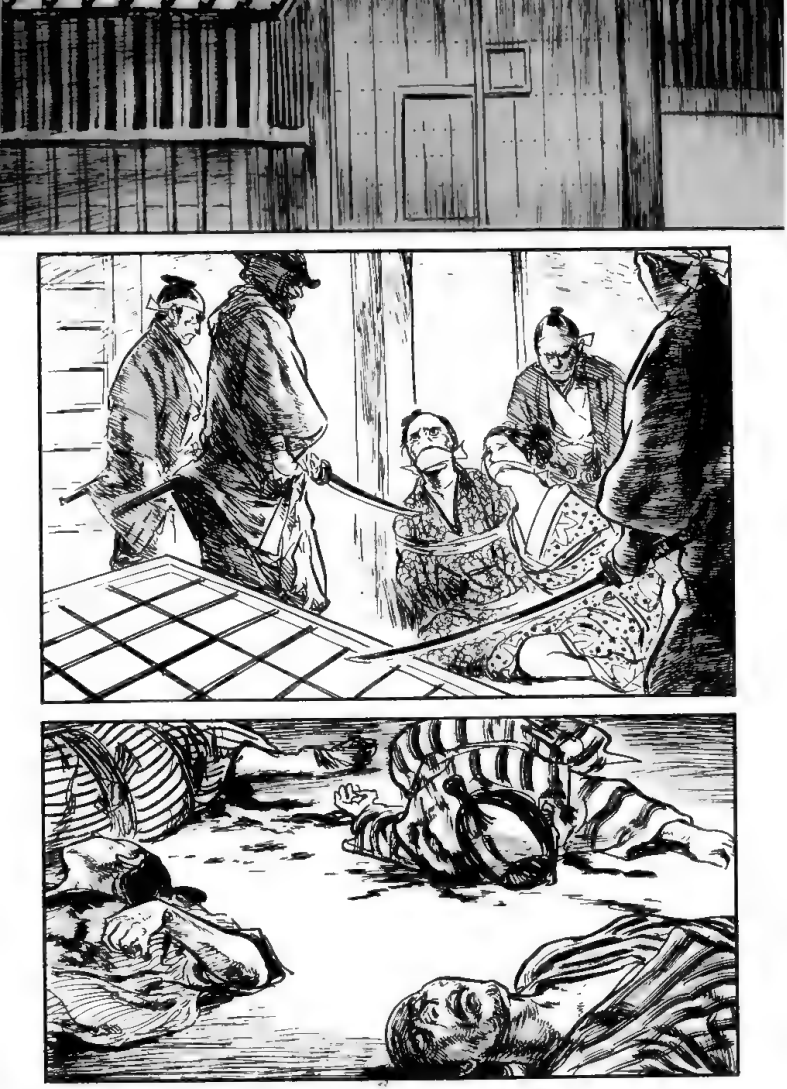
KATO-
ARATAME!
OPEN UP!
火盗
鬼

YES,
SIR.


GHHK?!


KCHAK
HYARGH!
AIEEEEEEEEEE!!!
GYAHHH!

M-M-
MURDERS!!



NGNN...
HRRG!

SHRUK
HEEEK!!
SNKK
HEH HEH HEH. I'D *RUN* IF I WERE YOU.

MONSTERS!!
KATO-ARATAME! YOU--!
DEMONS!!

大江
大江
大江

ANYONE THERE?!
NOBODY!
SKRSH SKRSH SKRSH
SKRSH SKRSH SKRSH
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH GOOD DISGUISE OR WHAT?
EHH HEH HEH HEH.

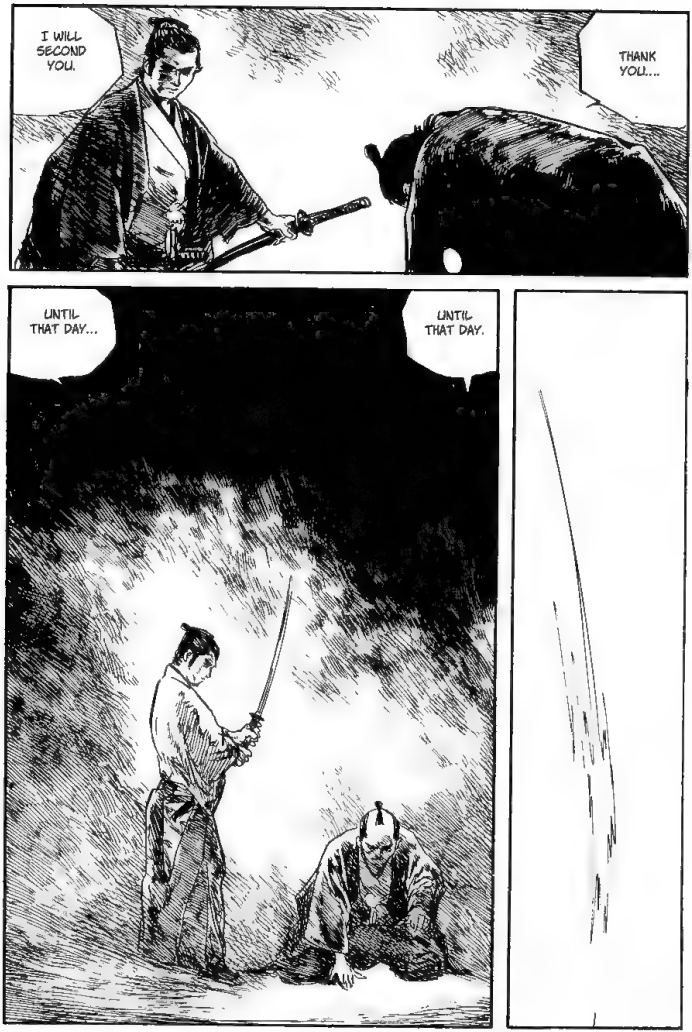
GOOD AND EVIL, ONE AND THE SAME.
EDO TERRORIZED OVERNIGHT.
FROM TERROR TO RAGE, CURSING THE KATO-ARATAME TO THE SKIES.

YOU KNOW WHY I'M HERE. TO *RETURN* THE POST OF EXECUTIONER.
WILL YOU TAKE IT BACK?
I WILL.

I FORCED MY WILL ON YOU, NEVER CONSIDERED YOUR POSITION. THAT'S... TROUBLED ME.
NOW THE DEMON PASSES WITHOUT REGRET.
KAGEBARA? ALREADY?
YAMADA-DONO. TO DRIVE OUT EVIL, TO BUILD A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE LIVE IN PEACE...
...WHAT ARE WE JITTE-MONO TO DO?
NOT IN THIS WORLD...
YOU SAY WE CAN'T?!
POVERTY. CLASS. POWER. AS LONG AS THOSE DIVIDES REMAIN...
HRNG...

EVERY TIME I RAISE MY SWORD...
...I ASK, WILL IT COME?
A DAY WHEN PEOPLE RESPECT EACH OTHER AND BUILD A BETTER WORLD? I ANSWER YES. AND SWING.
KILLING ANOTHER PERSON CAN NEVER BE FORGIVEN. NEVER.
BELIEVING IN THAT DAY, IN THIS WORLD I MAKE MYSELF GOD OF DEATH.
TO ENSURE THAT I WILL BE CONDEMNED.
EACH BEHEADING A LESSON FOR A LATER AGE.

HOPING THE DAY WILL COME WHEN HISTORY CURSES ME, I CUT OFF HEADS.
PRAYING THAT MY ACTS TODAY WILL MAKE IT END TOMORROW, I CUT OFF HEADS.
THE SCREAMS OF BOTH EXECUTED AND EXECUTIONER, ENTRUSTED TO THIS SINGLE WHITE BLADE....
THUS I, TOO, AM A *DEMON. NOW* AND *FOREVER.*
I AM NOT *WORTHY* OF SUCH A DEMON.
HIS WORDS REACH MY HEART....


I WILL SECOND YOU.
THANK YOU...
UNTIL THAT DAY...
UNTIL THAT DAY.

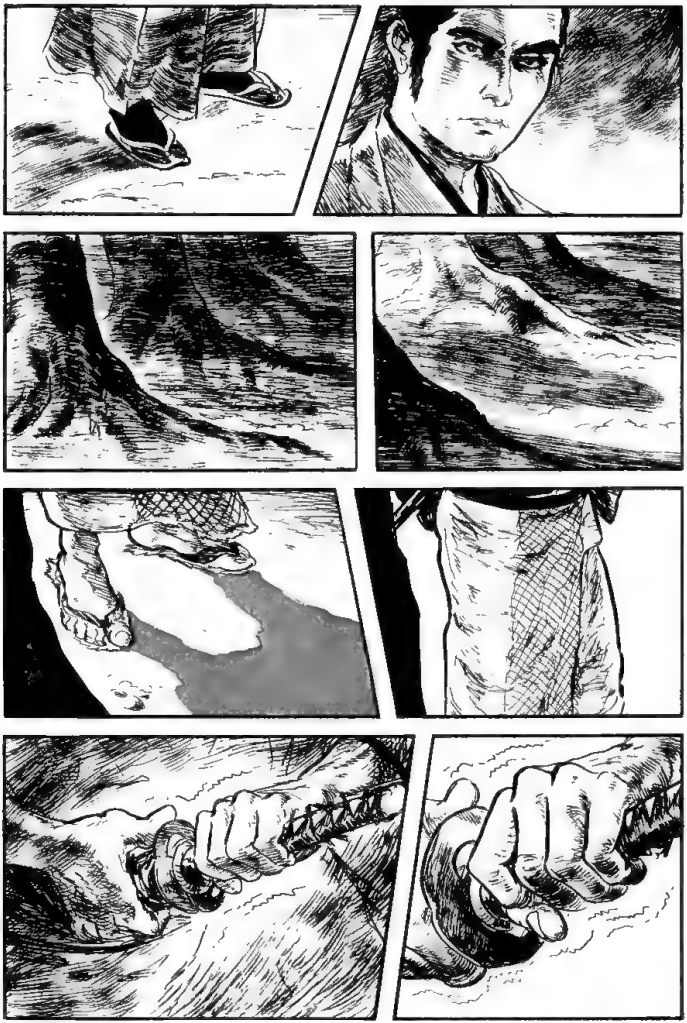
134

the thirty-sixth

A Death In Spring

FSSSSHHHHH
SKRSSSSH

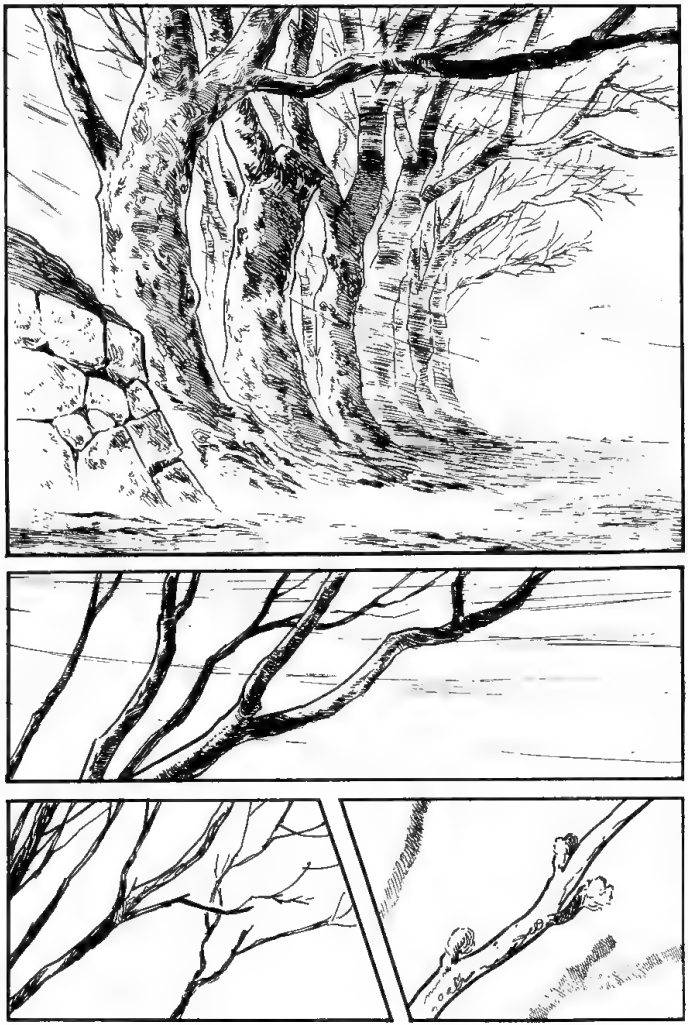
FWHOOOSH
SHHRSSSSH

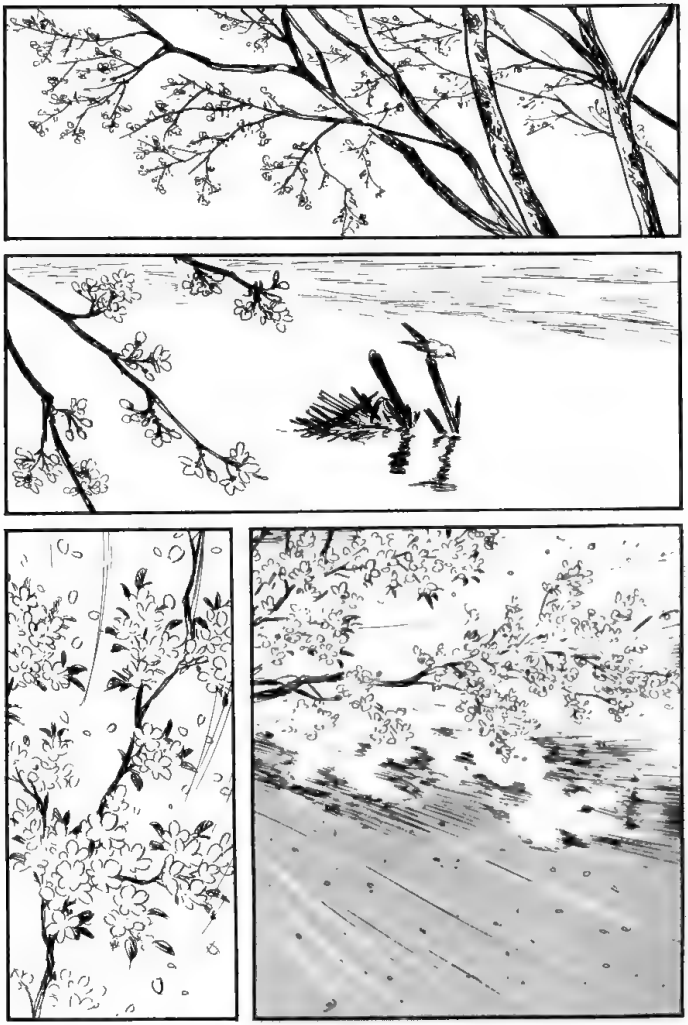


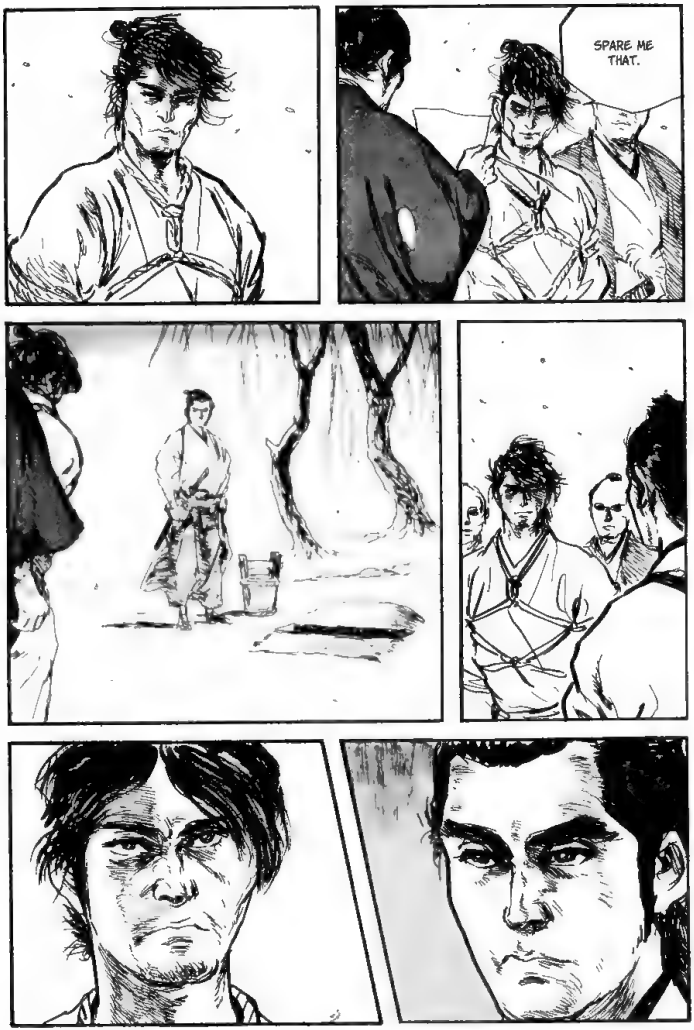
KRNCH
KRNCH
THIS WIND. HARU ICHIBAN!
SO NATURE TEACHES US.
THEY SAY IT HERALDS THE SPRING.
BUT IN OUR STRUGGLE TO LIVE, WE HUMANS DON'T NOTICE SPRING IS HERE.

SO NATURE SENDS A SECOND WIND.
TO TELL NOT JUST MAN, BUT ALL CREATION! BEAR THE COLD. LIVE BRAVE.
HARU NIBAN! THE SECOND WIND.
AND THEN COMES HARU SANBAN.
DO YOU KNOW THE TASK OF THE THIRD WIND, MY FRIEND?
THEY SAY IT SWELLS THE BLOSSOMS.
LIVE! BLOOM LIKE THE FLOWERS!

WHY SEEK OUT THE COLD IN THE LAST MELTING SNOW?
AS LONG AS WE LIVE...
...WE, TOO, CAN BLOSSOM!






SPARE ME THAT.

I TAKE YOUR TIME.
HAVE YOU ANY LAST WORDS?
IT WAS A LONG, HARD LIFE!
...PENNILESS... ... I MADE KITES, GROUND TOOTHPICKS, DID KASA-BARI. MY WIFE DID NEEDLEWORK.
OUR ONLY HOPE WAS THAT IF WE ENDURED, THE FLOWERS MIGHT BLOOM AGAIN.
BUT, BUT...
...AFTER ALL I PUT HER THROUGH, MY WIFE GOT TUBERCULOSIS ....

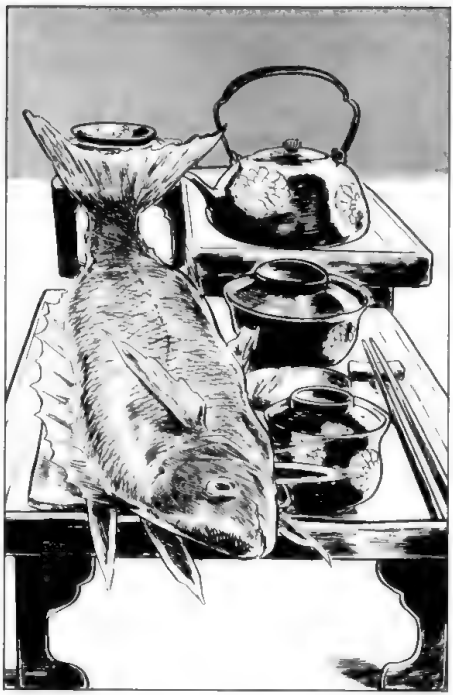
WE HAD NO FOOD, MUCH LESS MEDICINE. SHE WEAKENED.
ON HARU ICHIBAN, DEATH WAS NEAR.
SHE SAID... SHE WANTED A MIKAN.
AND I DECIDED... I'D ABANDON MY BUSHI PRIDE....
I'D GET HER THAT MIKAN... AND WE'D DIE TOGETHER.
I TURNED ROBBER. BUT THAT NIGHT...
...A WISE MAN CHIDED ME. "LIVE!" HE SAID. SPRING IS NEAR!
HE URGED ME TO TRY AGAIN...I RESOLVED TO CUP HER LAST WATER WITH CLEAN HANDS.
BUT, PERHAPS MY FEELINGS TOUCHED HER? SHE GOT BETTER.

AS THE THIRD WIND FATTENS THE BLOSSOMS, HER LIFE FORCE SWELLED.
RESIGNATION TURNED TO HOPE. I SWORE I WOULD CURE HER.
I BURNED TO MAKE HER WELL.
AND AGAIN I NEEDED MONEY. MONEY TO HEAL MY WIFE...
HAD I MET THAT GENTLEMAN AGAIN, WHAT WOULD HE HAVE SAID?
HARU YONBAN... THE FOURTH WIND WILL BLOW, SO PATIENCE. LIVE ON!
BUT THAT WIND CASTS DOWN THE FLOWERS.
YONBAN. THE FLOWER SCATTERER.
FOR US, IT WAS THE WIND OF DEATH!
HER HEART WEAKENED...

I STOLE MONEY, BOUGHT MEDICINE... TOO LATE.
THE DEATHWIND... WHAT WOULD HE SAY TO THAT?
SKSSH
NOT MEDICINE. WILL!
AFTER THE FOURTH WIND, THE TREES BEAR FRUIT!

the thirty-seventh

Okashiza-tsuki



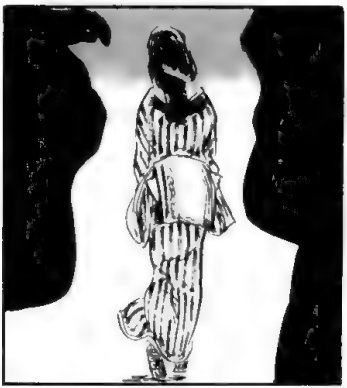
HEY, IT'S SHINKO THE KAPPA!
SO THAT'S HER...

THAT CATCHER KASAJIRO'S LOVE BRIDE.
SHE'S HOT ALL RIGHT. WANT'A RUN UP'N' GRAB HER.
TRY IT, AND SHE'LL GRAB YOU WHERE IT HURTS.
TOUGH-TALKING IRON LADY.
HER TATTOO'LL STARE YOU DOWN.
KLOK
KLOK
KLOK

京

YOU GOT YOUR WEDDING. YOU'RE A WIFE NOW.
AT LEAST PUT YOUR HAIR UP!
THAT KANSUKE WOMAN DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE.

ONCE A THIEF, ALWAYS A THIEF.



IS THAT HER...?
UH-HUH!
SHE REFUSED THE AWARD MONEY.
BUT WHY...?!
SHE WON'T MAKE MONEY FROM A WOMAN'S DEATH. NOT EVEN KANSUKE.
THAT'S NOBLE!
PUBLIC BATH

HAWWN
THAM
SPLSSH
THNK
THNK
KINK

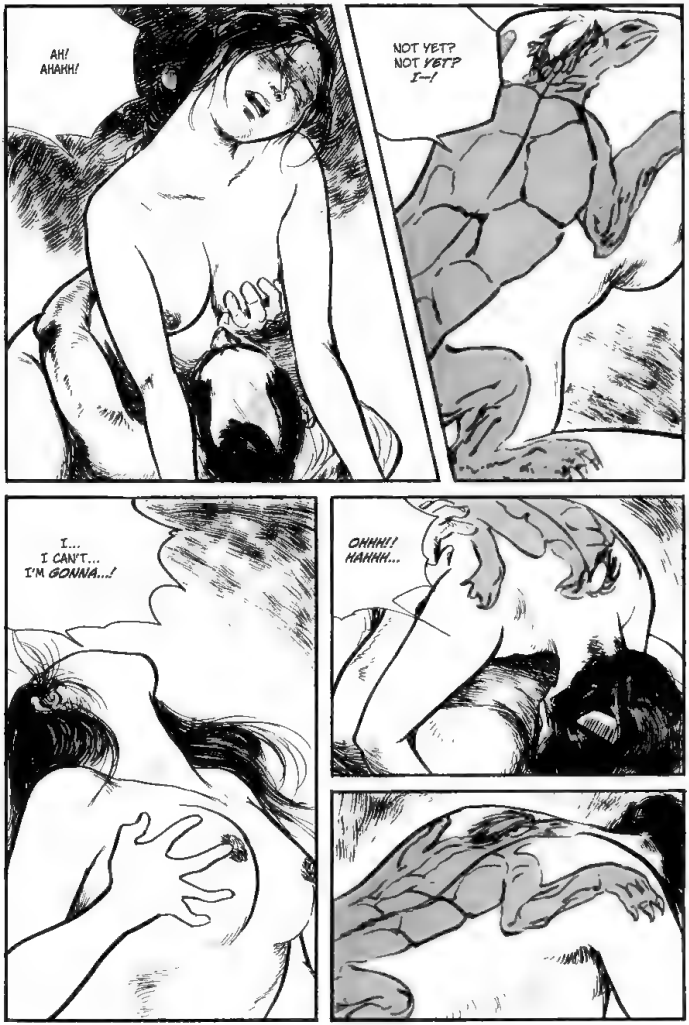
SPLASH!
SPRRRSH
KLONK
SPRRSH
WHAT'RE YOU DOING? RINSING OFF SWEAT? SUMMER'S OVER!
THE PUBLIC BATH'S FULL OF GOSSIPS!

STARING AT MY TATTOO!
SO WHAT?!
THEY'RE NOT GUYS, AND EVERYONE KNOWS.
I HATE IT. EVER SINCE THAT KANSUKE LADY DIED.
HAVE IT YOUR WAY.
AND YOU VAMOOSE!
NO WAY. I'M YOU'RE HUBBY NOW.

ENOUGH... YOU'LL TIRE YOURSELF.
I'M *FINE!*
I'M GOING *SOFT* JUST LYING AROUND.

OH YOU! DON'T YOU THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE?
AHH...!
OH,
OHH
MMM!

HONEY, STOP.
YOUR WOUNDS'LL OPEN...
YOU SHOULDN'T DO THIS...
TOO LATE NOW...
AHH... I, I...
I'LL GET ON TOP...
YOU MUSTN'T... HURT YOURSELF...
IF THEY RE-OPEN...


AH!
AHAHH!
NOT YET?
NOT YET?
I—!
I...
I CAN'T...
I'M GONNA...!
OHHH!!
HAHHH...

HONEY...
WE SHOULD HAVE A HOUSE-WARMING.
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.
CAN I PUT UP MY HAIR FOR IT?
AND SHAVE MY EYEBROWS?
I LIKE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE.
PLEASE? CAN I...?
WELL... I GUESS.
OH! AND SHINKO, PICK UP THE O-BUGYO'S LETTER.
AND THE REWARD MONEY

UH-UH! I TOLD YOU NO.
LOOK, HE SENT ANOTHER MESSENGER. HE'S MY BOSS.
KANSUKE AND I WERE BOTH BAD WOMEN. IF I HADN'T MET YOU...
...I MIGHT HAVE WOUND UP LIKE HER.
I'M SO HAPPY IT'S SCARY.
TO TAKE MONEY, TOO...
CAN'T DO IT!
I JUST CAN'T!

AH
GAH
HAH
HAH
BWAH
HAH
HAH
GYAH
HAH
HAH
HAH

HAH
HAH
HAHH!
WAHH
HAHHA!

EH
HEH
HEH

WATCH OUT, SAKANE. SHE'LL BE WEARING YOUR JITTE.
NOT YOU TOO, MURAKAMI-SAMA.

IT'S TRUE, TOO TRUE!
SHE DON'T NEED YOU, KID!

BROKEN UMBRELLA JIRŌ! SHE PATCHED YOU GOOD!
WHAT A SIGHT! SAKANE PLAYING DEAD, AND--
PLEASE, MURAKAMI-SAMA. NOT AGAIN...
BWAH HAH HAHAHAH HAH!

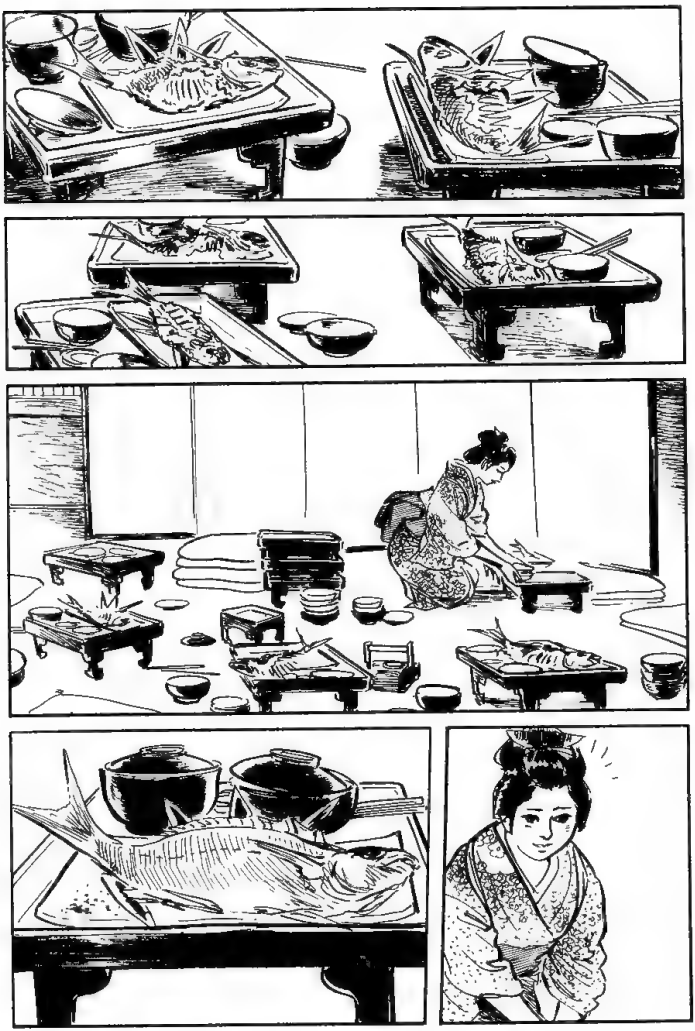
CONGRATS, KID.
BWAH HAH HAH
YAH HAH HAH
YAMADA-SAMA? A DRINK?
I DON'T PARTAKE, BUT...
...JUST THIS TIME.

HA HA HA
PARDON ME, BUT... THE *REWARD?*
SAKANE EXPLAINED. BUT...
...I CAN'T TELL THE *O-BUGYO.*
NO ONE *EVER* TURNS HIM DOWN.

MURAKAMI-SAMA. PLEASE...
ANYTHING BUT THAT...
I CAN'T BEAR IT. NOT WITH MY PAST.
KANSUKE AND I WERE SO... ...ALIKE.
BUT FOR HER, DEATH. AND ME, JOY.
TO TAKE MONEY TOO...
I UNDERSTAND. BUT THE O-BUGYŌ WROTE THE LETTER WITH HIS OWN HAND...

I'LL TELL HIM, SIR.
PLEASE, IT MEANS SO MUCH TO HER...
WELL... WE'LL SEE...
TIME FOR A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE.
YEAH! HERE IT COMES!
KLAP
KLAP
KLAP
TUM TUM
DA DAH!
SMOOCH
SMOOCH
AHHHN!
DARLING!

BWAHH HAH HAH HAH
AHH HAH HAH!
YEE-HAW!!
MMMM!
OH OH OH!
NOT THERE!
OHH!
HAH HAH HAH!
HAH
HAH HAH!
GYAGHH HAH HAH!
HAH HAH HAH HAH



YAMADA-SAMA DIDN'T TOUCH IT?
AND OKASHIRATSUKI, TOO...
DIDN'T TOUCH IT...?
THE HEAD ATTACHED...
AHH?!
WHAT HAVE I DONE... I DIDN'T THINK.
I'VE INSULTED HIM. WHY DIDN'T I REMOVE THE HEAD...

YAMADA-*SAMA*, FORGIVE LAST NIGHT...
THE *OKASHIRATSUKI*, I PRESUME.

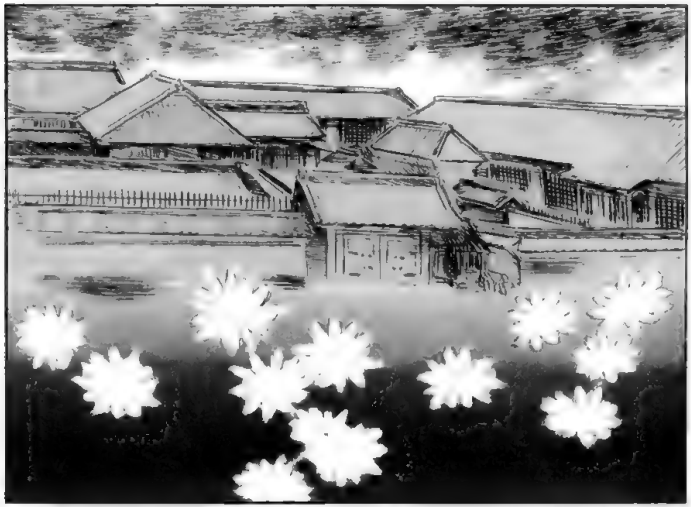
I WASN'T THINKING...
I EXPECTED YOU TODAY!
WHAT KUBIKIRI ASA TOUCHES, LOSES ITS HEAD. SO I SPURNED IT?
I'M SORRY!
YOU NEEDN'T WORRY.
I LIKE OKASHIRA-TSUKI.
KUBIKIRI ASA WON'T EAT THIS.
I CAN'T BECAUSE OF KANSUKE...
CAN'T YOU SEE IT'S EVEN CRUELER TO THINK THAT WAY?

I WANT OKASHI-RATSUKI.
I DON'T WANT PEOPLE WORRYING ABOUT ME AT PARTIES.
KANSUKE IS GONE. PURIFIED OF HER SINS BY DEATH. EVOKING HER PAST ONLY HURTS HER.
IF YOU'RE SO LIKE HER, LIVE JOYFULLY. FOR BOTH OF YOU.
THANK YOU!
OUR LIVES BELONG TO US ALONE.
LIVE LONG, OR SHORT. WELL, OR POORLY. WE DECIDE.
LIVE THIS ONE LIFE PROUDLY. WITHOUT SHAME!

DANG THAT GIRL...!
WHERE'D SHE GO...?
NOT SHOPPING, I GUESS... IT'S BEEN FOUR HOURS.
I'M HOME!
SHINKO!
WHERE HAVE YOU--
HAH?!
HONEY, I'M OFF TO GET OUR REWARD.

the thirty-sixth

A Death In Spring



HEY, WAIT A MINUTE.
I'LL HEAR YOUR LAST WORDS.
JUST... GIMME A SEC, OKAY?
DON'T GOT LAST WORDS! JUST... WAIT.

NNNGN...
DAMN!
READY ?!
A BIT LONGER. I'M BEGGIN' YOU.
RMM... HRMM... DAMN...!
IT'S NO GOOD...

WHAT ISN'T?!
IT'S OKAY. I QUIT.
SORRY TO HOLD YOU UP. GO ON. CHOP!
YOU QUIT?! AT DEATH'S DOOR? WHAT?!
WHEN FOLK CROAK, IT ALL GOES WHITE, SEE?
LIKE, YOU REMEMBER SOMEONE REAL CLEAR. YOU SUCK YOUR LAST BREATH SEEIN' HIM.
AN' THEY SAY, YOU SEE A FACE.

RIGHT?! LIKE, BURNED INTO YOUR EYES.
KIDS, LOVERS, PARENTS...MAYBE THE JERK YOU OFFED.
ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, SOMEONE FLOATS UP.
BUT ME? RIGHT NOW...? CAN'T REMEMBER A DAMN THING! IT'S PATHETIC! I LIVED BAD, BUT I'M STILL HUMAN.
IF I GOTTA PAY THE REAPER, I WANTA REMEMBER SOMEONE! GOTTA BE SOMEBODY I CARED ABOUT!
THAT'S WHY I'M GROANING.
THERE AIN'T! DON'T SEE NOBODY!
NEVER KNEW MY FOLKS. NEVER LOVED.

'COURSE NO BROTHER, SISTER...
I BEDDED HUNDREDS OF GALS, VIRGIN REAPER KIJUZO THEY CALLED ME... CAN'T RECALL A ONE!
BEEN TRYING TO! ONE I LIKED, ONE THAT WAS HOT IN BED, BUT... THEY'RE ALL JUMBLED UP, IT'S FRIGGIN' KARMA.
ARRGH! COME ON!
AT LEAST ONE! JUST ONE...
ALL GONE!
DAMN IT ALL!
HRK...
I... I'M HUMAN, TOO. AIN'T THERE ONE PERSON OUT THERE... HRGK...
JUST ONE THAT'D... THAT'D...
...CRY FOR ME? THAT'S THE FACE...

I WANTA DIE... HAHF...SEEIN' THAT FACE...
THINK OF NATURE, OF THE SEASONS...
THINK OF YOUR HOME!
RAIN!

KRRRSSSH
NOW I THINK ABOUT IT, ONE GIRL... ONE...
LIKED ME, MAYBE...?

I DIDN'T ASK, SO MAYBE I'M MAKIN' IT UP...
BACK THEN I DIDN'T THINK SHE DID.
CAN'T PICTURE HER *FACE*...
IT WAS IN *AGEO*... A *PEASANT* KID. BOUGHT HER CHEAP, *GREAT* BOD.
MAYBE 'CUZ I'M *KNEELING* HERE...
ANYWAY, THERE'S A GIRL I... *HOPE* DID.

MADE A WOMAN OF HER ON THE WAY BACK. BUT I GOT SICK OUTSIDE EDO.
ON MY BACK IN OMIYA, THREE DAYS...
SHE COULDA RUN EASY... BUT SHE STAYED'N' NURSED ME...
OH WELL. I CLEANED HER UP, GOT A GOOD PRICE FOR HER IN ITABASHI.
BUT WHEN I LEFT HER, SHE CRIED, GAVE ME... A FLOWER...

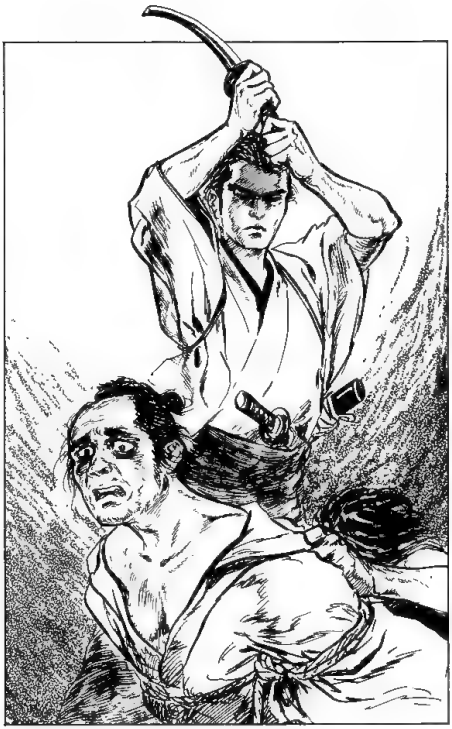
IT WAS RAINING, LIKE NOW. I TOSSED IT, BUT...
IT WAS PURPLE...
LIKE A LITTLE MUM...
MIYAKO-WASURE.
M-- MIIYA... FORGET-ME-NOT?!

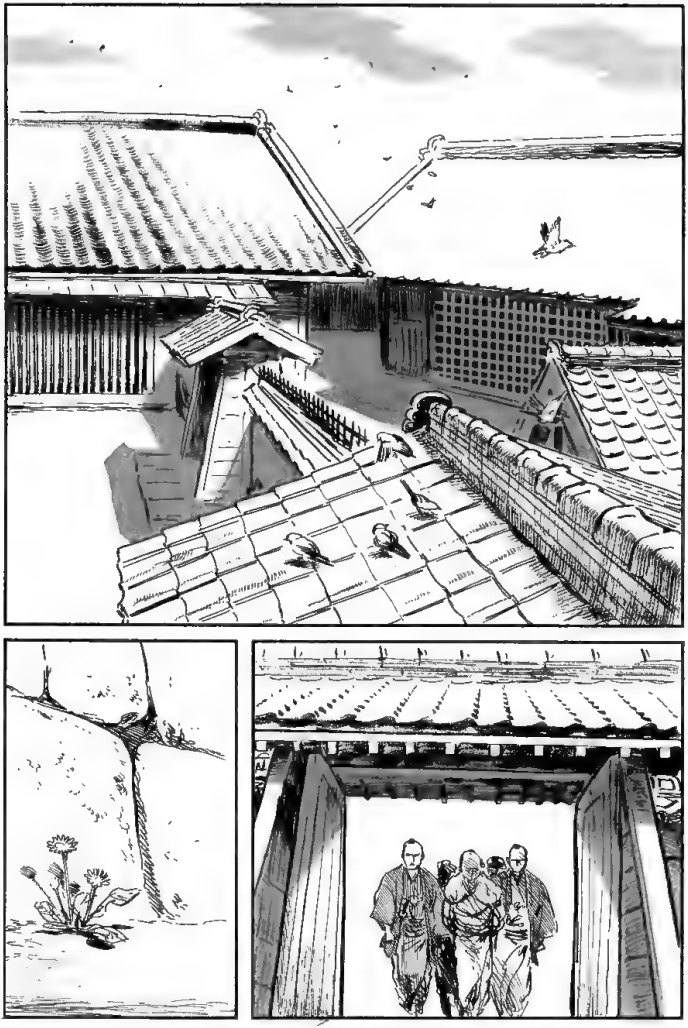
I REMEMBER!
I CAN SEE HER!
OH GOD!
D=
S
A
T
O
H
H
H
H!
BSSSH

SKRRRSSSH
THAT ONE TOOK TIME.
I'VE BEHEADED A THOUSAND MEN.
HOW MANY OF THEM, STARING DEATH IN THE FACE...
...WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE ANOTHER'S?

the thirty-ninth

Everything but Death

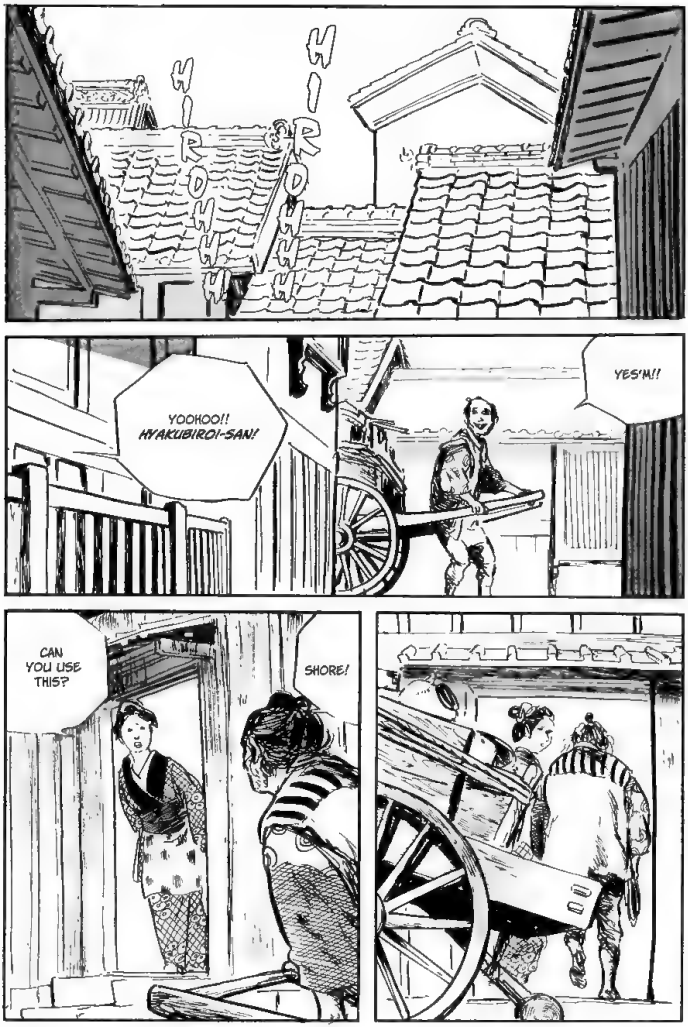




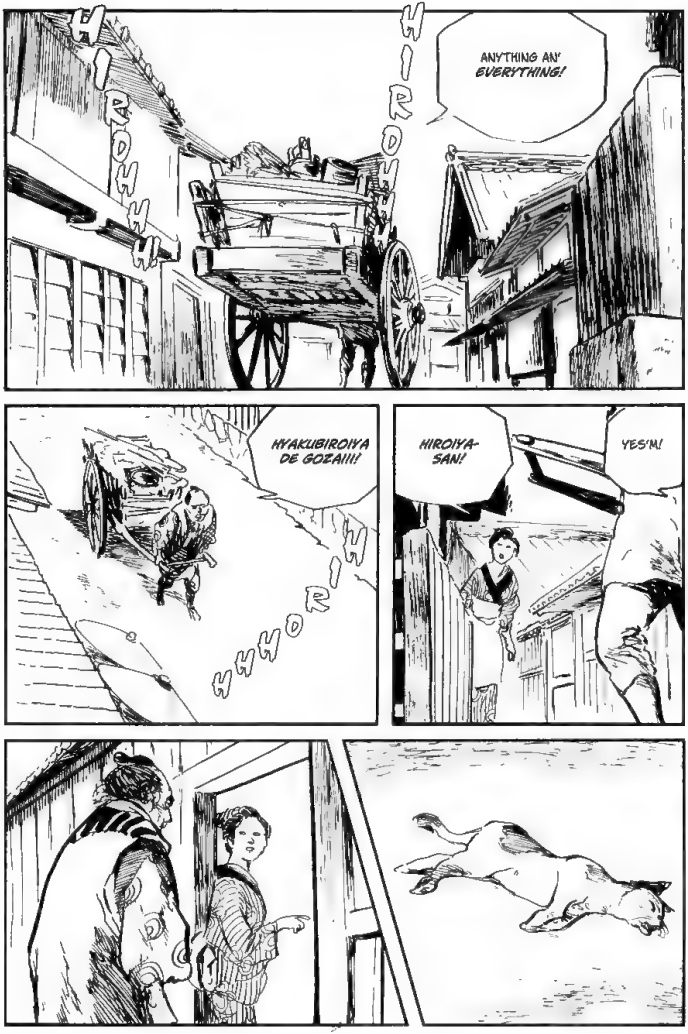
DON'T NEED PAPER, SIR.
YOU GOT *NERVE*.
UH-UH, NOT *ME*, SIR.
JES' LOOK...
SO SCARED MY LEGS IS FROZE... CAN'T *BUDGE* 'EM.
THEN WHY *REFUSE*?
WHY, IT'S A *WASTE*, SIR.
LIKE, EVEN A MASK... IT'S STILL *PAPER*.
PAPER'S FOR WRITIN' 'N' STUFF. IF I GET *BLOOD* ON IT, HAIN'T NICE TO THE FOLK WHAT MADE IT.
PAPER... EVEN *PAPER*... IT'S *USEFUL*... KIN'T *WASTE* IT...

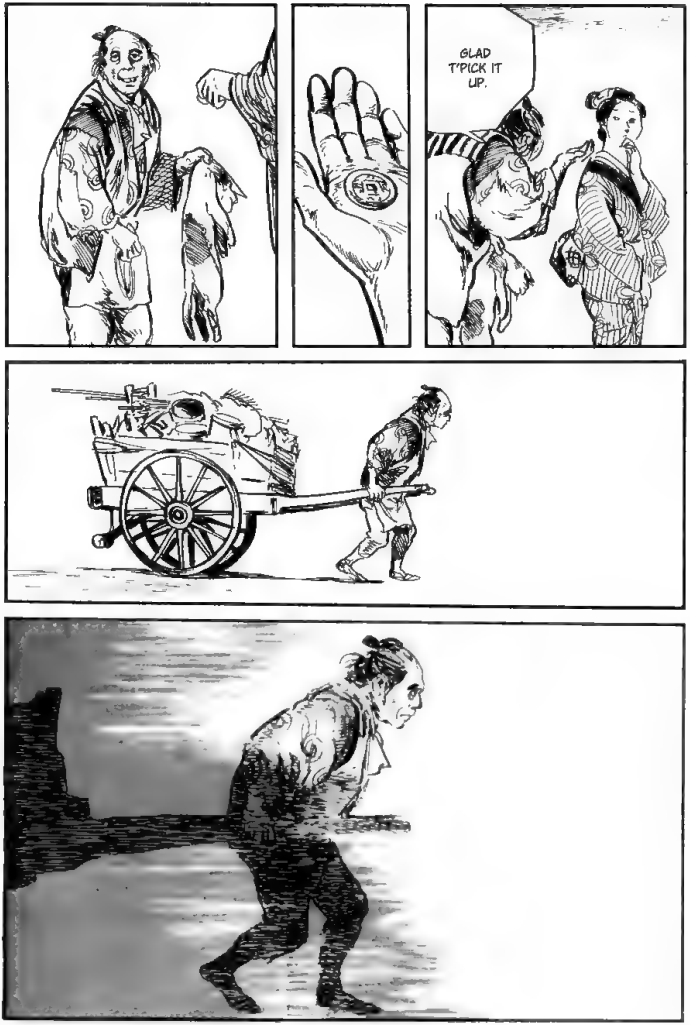
HRMF?!
YOU'RE A HYAKUBIROI?
YASSIR. I PICK UP STUFF PEOPLE DON'T NEED, 'N' FIX IT UP HYAKUMON THE HYAKUBIROI.

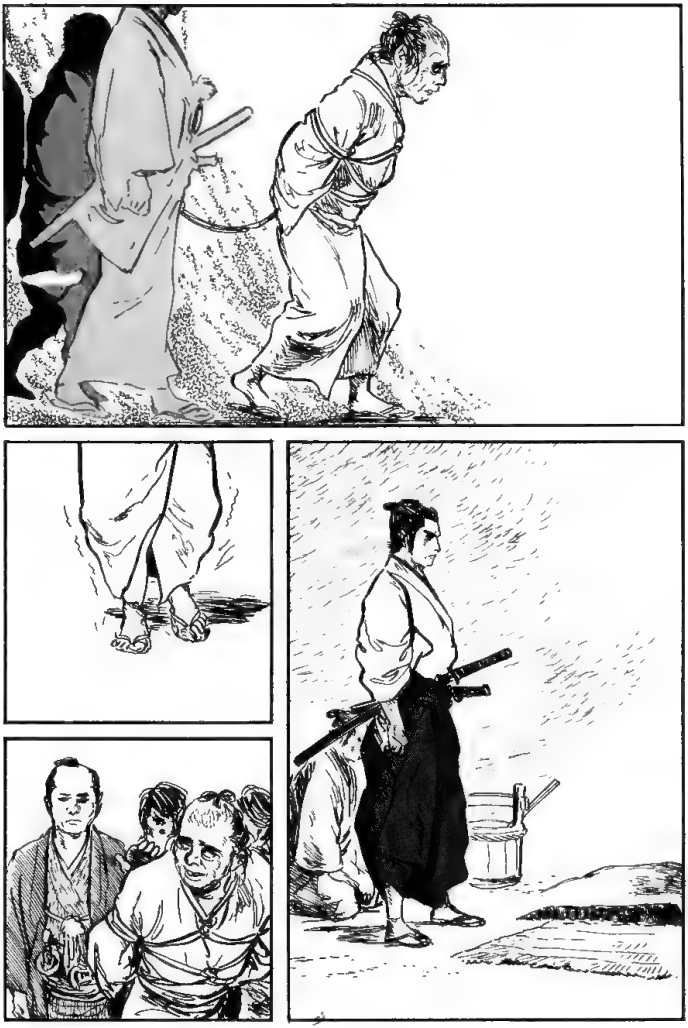
HIROHHH!
HYAKUHIROHH!
HIROHHH!
HYAKU-
BIROI DE
GOZA!!!!!

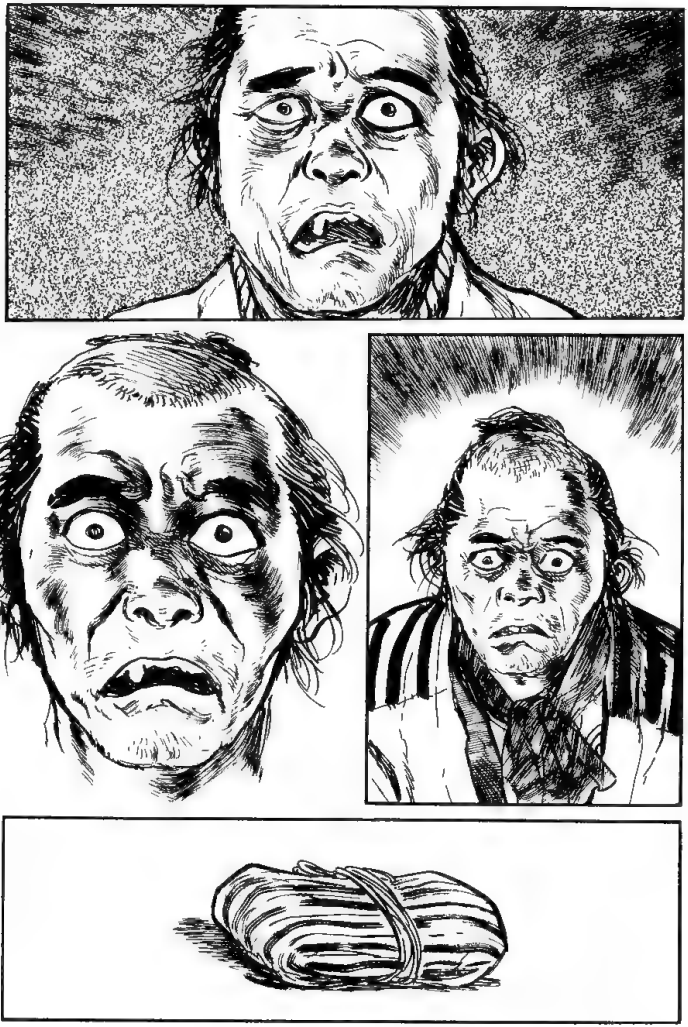

HIROHHH
HIROHHH
YOOHOO!! HYAKUBIROI-SAN!
YES'M!!
CAN YOU USE THIS?
SHORE!

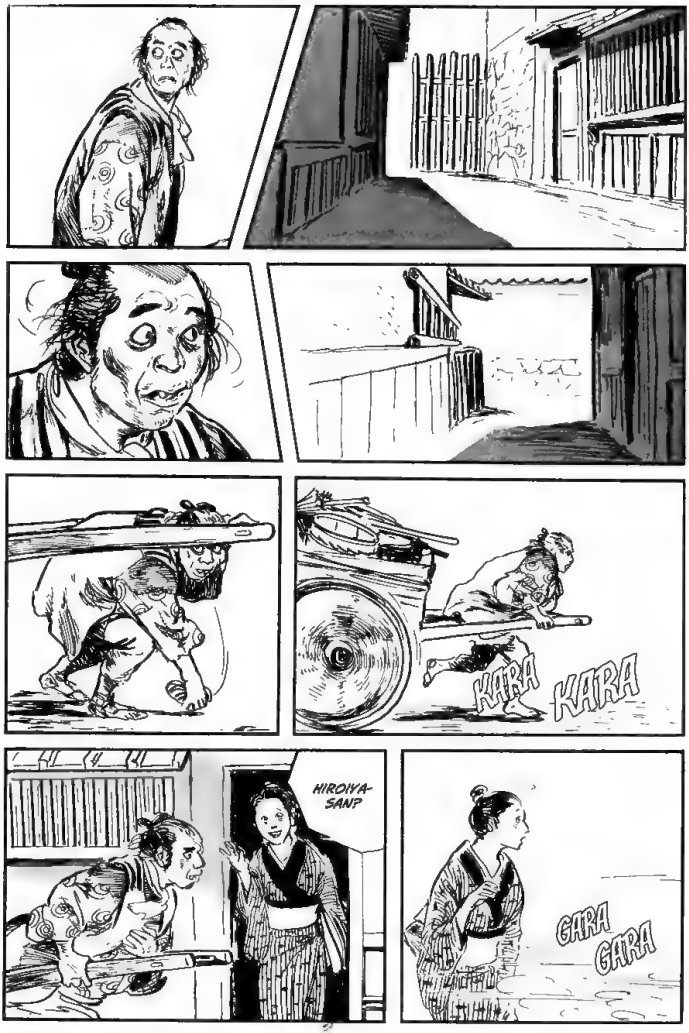
I'LL TAKE IT, MA'AM.
ANYTHING USEFUL?
NOPE, NOT THIS LOT.
JES' KINDLIN' FOR THE BATHHOUSE.
WELL, I'D PAY FOR SWEEPING.
SHORE!


HIROOOH
HIROOOH
ANYTHING AN' EVERYTHING!
HYAKUBIROIYA DE GOZAIII!
HHHORI-H
HIROIYA-SAN!
YES'M!


GLAD T'PICK IT UP.

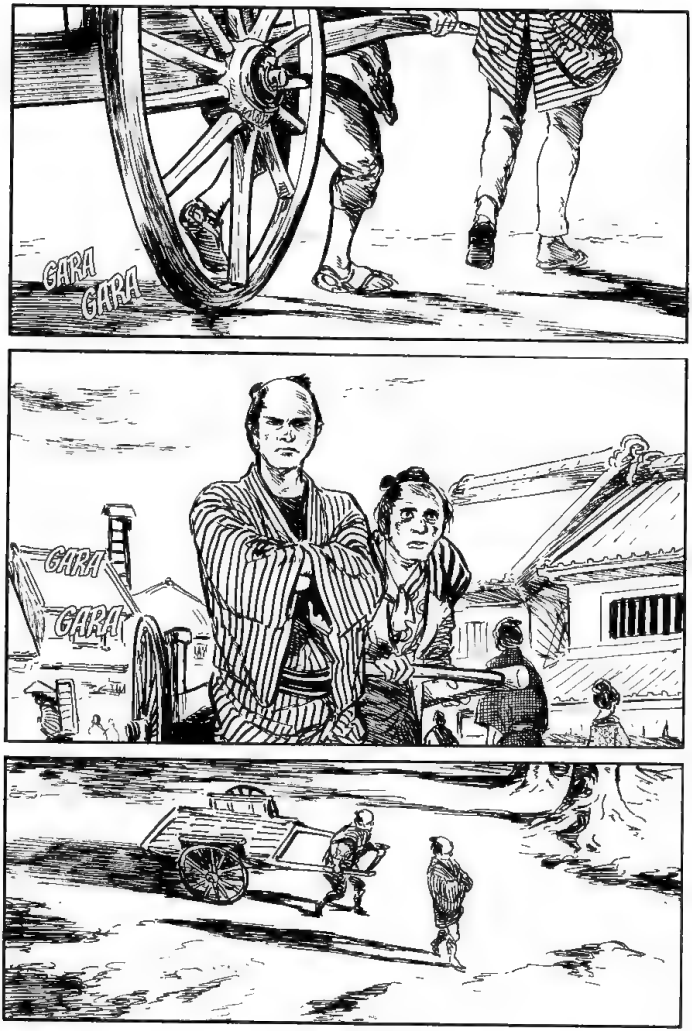





KARA
KARA
HIROIYA-SAN?
GATA
GATA

YOU *HYAKUBIRO!* GOTTA *ASK* BEFORE YOU TAKE.
YOU START *POCKETING* STUFF...
...WHERE DO WE *JITTEMON* GET CASK?
SPAKK
OUWW!
I WAS JES' GONNA... *TURN IT IN!*
YASSIR. R--REALLY *WAS,* SIR.
RIGHT... I *SAW* YOU POCKET IT.

CAN'T FOOL KURUMAZAKA NO JUZO!
SO, OLD MAN HIROI.
IT'S UP TO ME TO ARREST YOU, OR NOT.
I'LL SAY YOU WERE TURNING IT IN.
OH! OYABUN, SIR! KIND SIR!
BUT IN TRADE, I NEED YOUR HELP.
YASSIR! ANYTHING, SIR!
GO GET YOUR CART.
...SIR?!


GARA
GARA
GARA
GARA

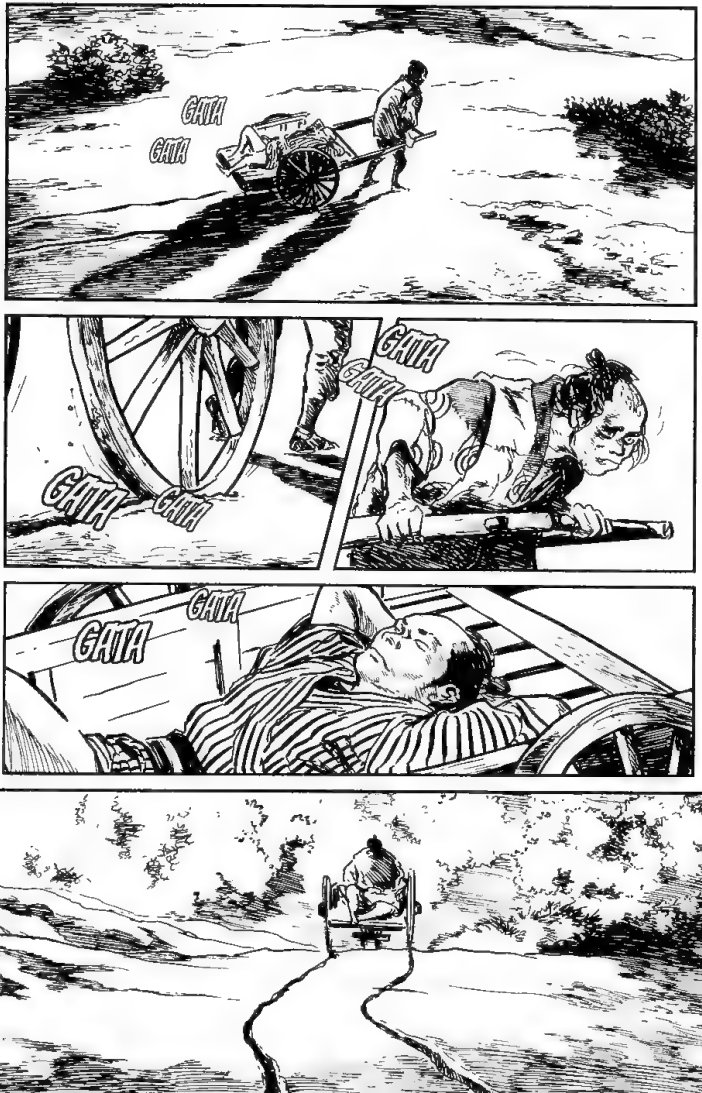
O-
OYABUN?

HOW, LIM... FAR...
Y' WANT ME TO GO?

SHUDDUP AND FOLLOW.

Y- YASSIR..

HALT.
YASSIR.
WE'LL TAKE A SHORTCUT.
I'LL RIDE.
THAT WAY. THROUGH THE WOODS. IT'S SHORTER.
HARD ON *YOU*, BUT YOU *OWE* ME.
SH-SHORE, SIR.
BEEN WORKING NIGHT AND DAY.
A LITTLE STROLL WEARS ME OUT.
SO. LET'S GO.
YASSIR.


GATA
GATA
GATA
GATA
GATA
GATA
GATA
GATA

THIS'LL DO. STOP HERE.
SHORE.

WAIT HERE.
OKAY.

AND STAY *PUT!* MIGHT TAKE ALL *NIGHT*..
Y- YES, SIR.

HEY, PROBABLY *WON'T*.
BUT RUN OFF, YOU'LL *REGRET* IT.
NOT *ME*, SIR.

?

HYUUU
BYUUU
FUWWSSSH
SUWWSSH
HYUUU
HYUUHHH

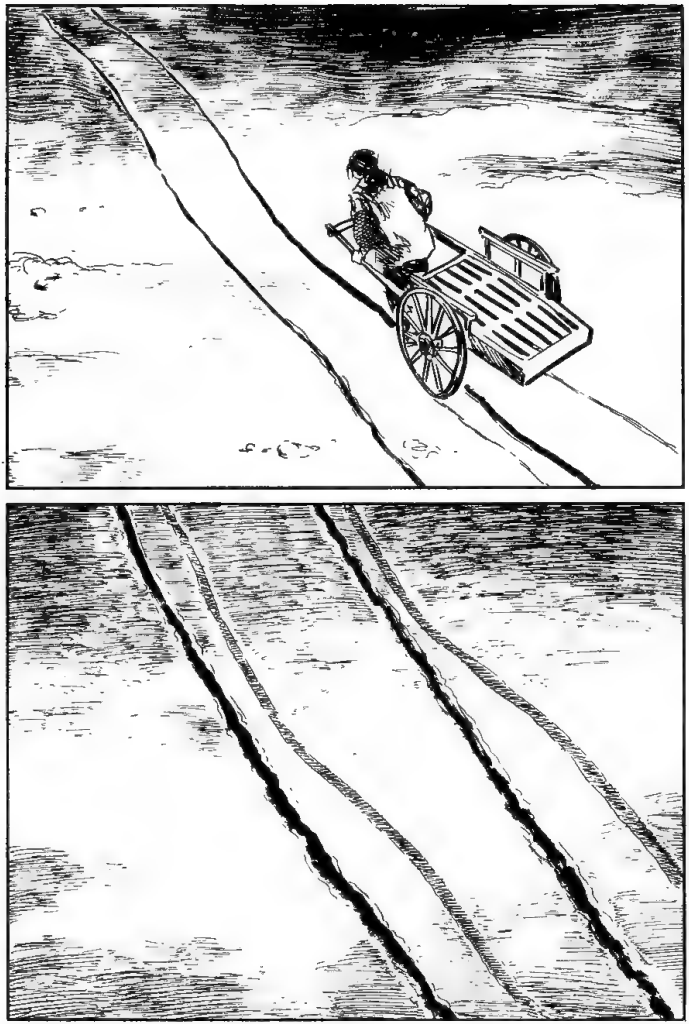
THAK
WHERE'S THE YOUNG MASTER?
CASH, LADY. FIGURE IT OUT.
IF HE'S NOT COMING, I'M LEAVING.
LOOK. JUST TAKE IT AND SCRAM.
LISTEN, OYABUN.
I CAME OUT HERE TO SEE THE YOUNG MASTER.

NOT FOR SOME PAYOFF.
NOW YOU LISTEN, OYABUN. MY HEART IS SET.
NO ONE WILL TEAR US APART.
HEY. HELP ME SAVE FACE.
I WILL NOT!
WHY SHOULD I?
I'M CARRYING HIS BABY.
I SUPPORTED HIM WHEN THEY DISOWNED HIM, BUT NOW THEY WANT HIM BACK...
IT'S TOO CRUEL!
I WON'T LEAVE... I'LL STOP THAT MARRIAGE!

SORRY 'BOUT THIS.
I'LL SEE YOU OFF.
YOU CAN STRUGGLE. BUT YOU CAN'T WIN.
I'LL ASK AGAIN.
NEVER!
TOO BAD.

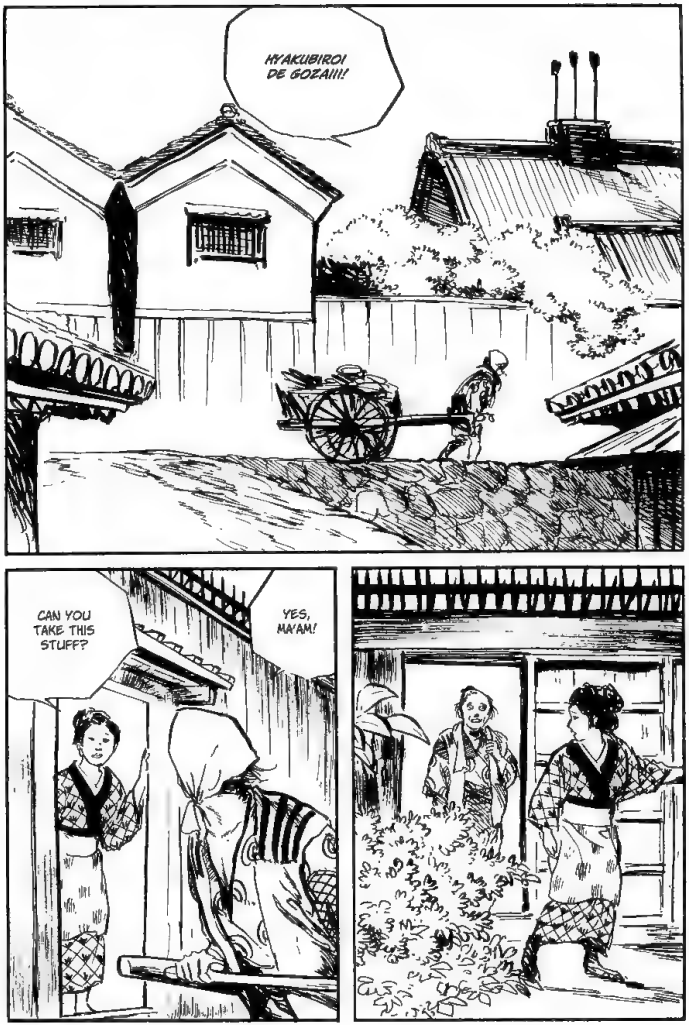
HYOOOOO
FYYUUUU
FWWHOOSH
HYUUUU
HYUUUU
AIIIEEE!
BYYUUUU
HYUUUU
FFOOOSH
IMAGININ' THINGS...?
HSXUUUU

KEPT YOU WAITING. YOU CAN GO.
HUH?!
I WAS TRACKING SMUGGLERS, BUT THEY GAVE ME THE SLIP.
S-SMUG-GLERS?!
WANTED TO CART BACK THE GOODS.

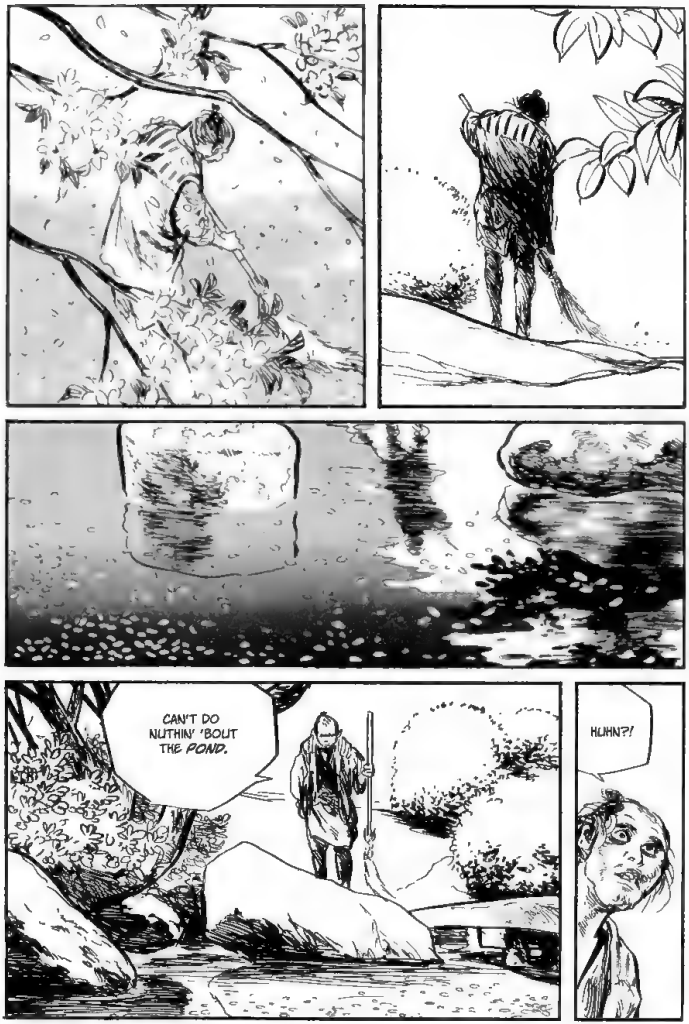


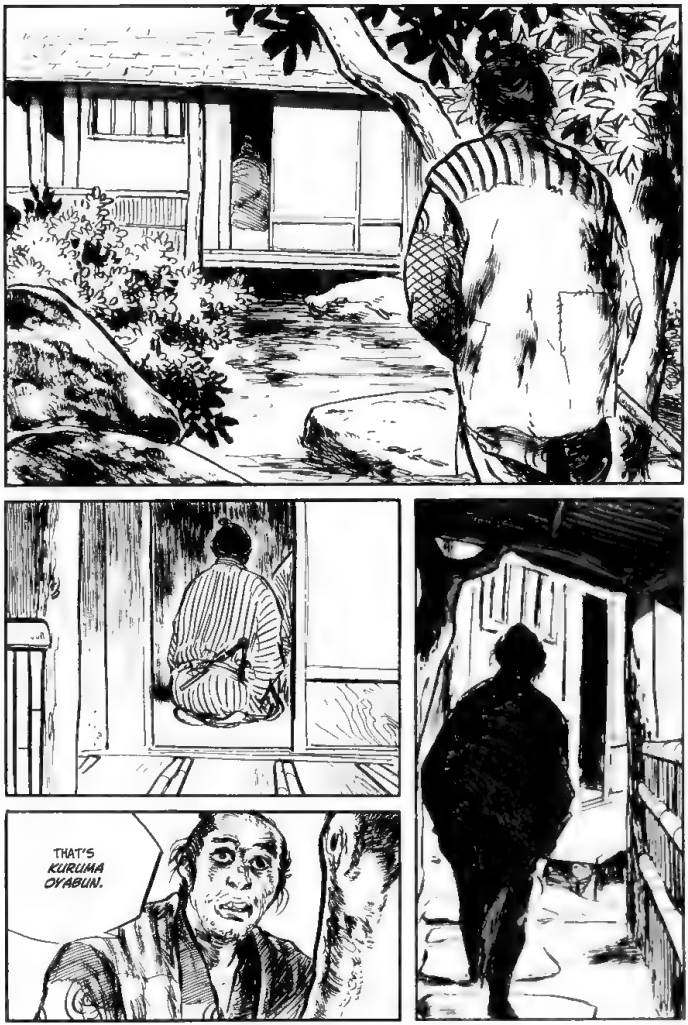
ANY LAST WORDS?
WORDS WON'T CHANGE NOTHIN'. I MEAN...
I'M A GONER... IT'S SET UP LIKE THAT.
BAD FORTUNE... OR MAYBE HELL'S DOIN'...
IT'S ALL SET UP... SO I DIE.
IT'S JUST GONNA BE...

HIHHHDRI
GARA
GARA
HIROHH!
HIROHH!
HYAKUBIRO.HHH!
PICK UP ANYTHING!!


HYAKUBIROI
DE GOZAIII!
CAN YOU TAKE THIS STUFF?
YES, MA'AM!

AND SWEEP THE GARDEN?
SHORE!
PETALS EVERY-WHERE.
YES'M!


CAN'T DO NUTHIN' 'BOUT THE *POND*.
HUHN?!


THAT'S
KURUMA
OYABUN.

HEH HEH HEH DON'T WORRY, SIR.
I GOT US A *PERP.*
YES, SIR. THE PERFECT *STOOGE.* AND I LEFT EVIDENCE.
THE TRACKS FROM HIS *CART.*
DEEPER *GOING* THAN *COMING.* LIKE HE CARTED THE CORPSE AND *BURIED* IT.

IT'S ROCK SOLID. I'LL EVEN ARREST HIM *MYSELF.*
I'LL BEAT HIM UP SO BAD BEFORE THE *DOSHIN* QUESTIONS HIM HE WON'T BE ABLE TO *TALK.*
HAVE A *FINE* MARRIAGE, YOUNG MASTER.
HEH HEH HEH. THANK YOU KINDLY.

I'SE A HIROIYA. I PICK UP ANYTHING, BUT...
...I DON'T PICK UP LIVES...
IF'N SOMEONE MAKES ME... PICK UP OTHER FOLK'S' LIVES... THEN... THEN...

O-OYABUN-SAN.
WHAT THE HELL?
I HEARD EVERYTHING!
WHAT'D YOU SAY?
OYABUN'S KILLED SOMEONE, AND HE'S MAKIN' ME PICK'M UP!
THAT'S WHY YOU TOOK ME THERE THAT DAY!
D- D- DAMMIT!
EVEN THET WALLET! YOU PUT IT THERE!

M-
MONSTER!!
YOU
DUMB--!
KRAK!
THUD
SPRAK
BRAKK
FWD
SHOKK

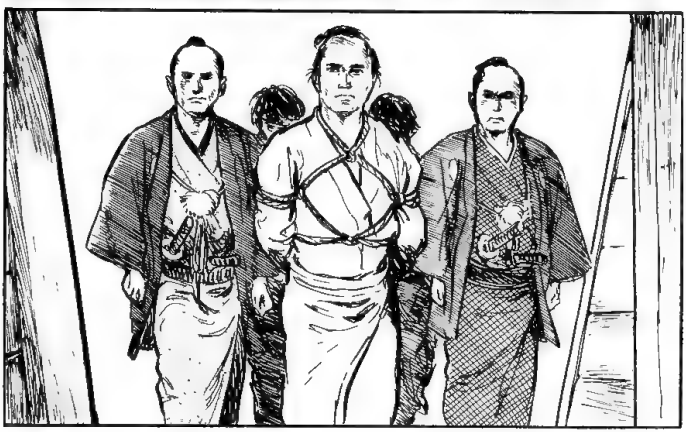
KRAKK
SPAAA
THWAK
Y-YOU WON'T... GET AWAY WITH THIS...
BUT I WON'T PICK UP YER LIFE!!
DON'T!!

I DON'T PICK UP LIVES!!
BRSSH!

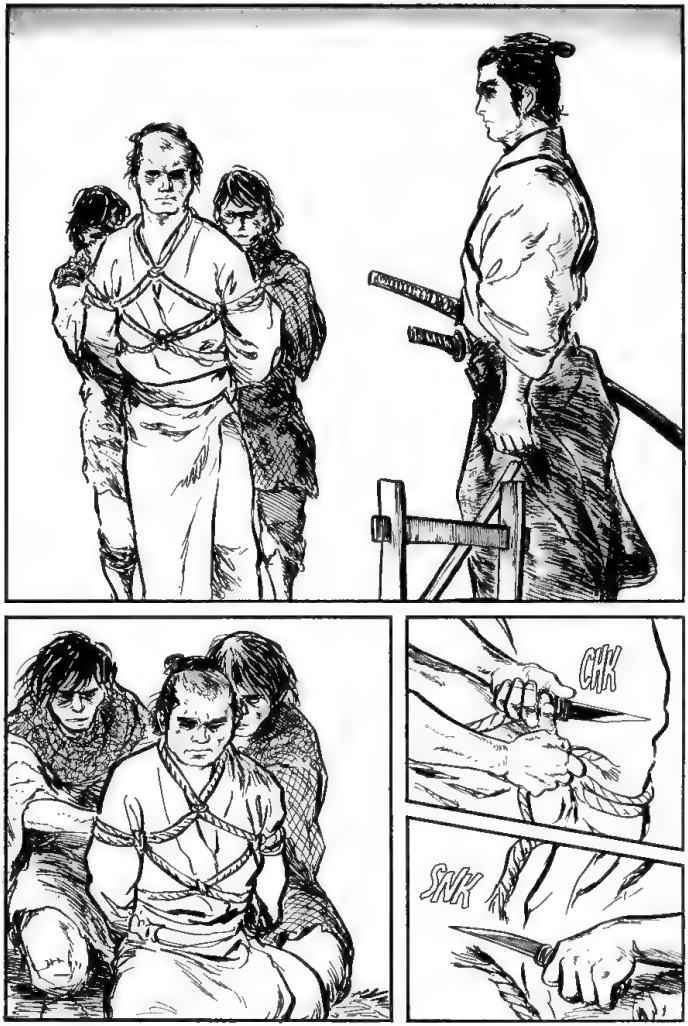
TRUE.
WE CAN'T...
...EVEN
WHEN WE
WANT TO.

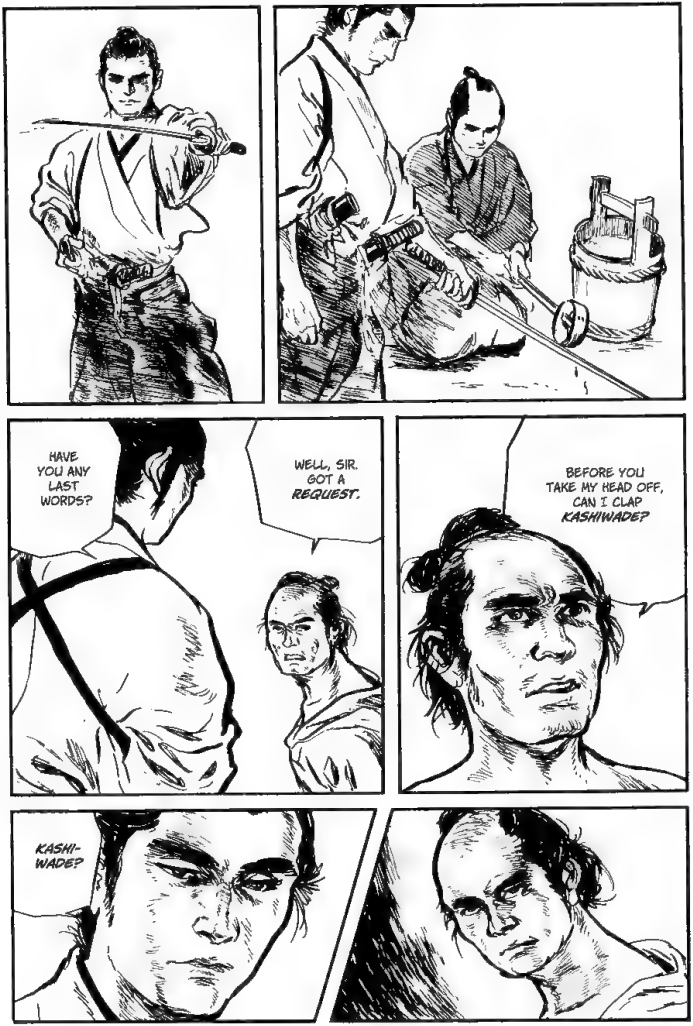
the fortieth

One Too Many



DON'T NEED IT. EVERYTHING'S PAINTED BLACK.
PAINTED BLACK? CLEVER.
WORTHY OF A BOKUJUYA.
HAVE IT YOUR WAY.


CHK
SNK


HAVE YOU ANY LAST WORDS?
WELL, SIR. GOT A REQUEST.
BEFORE YOU TAKE MY HEAD OFF, CAN I CLAP KASHIWADE?
KASHI-WADE?

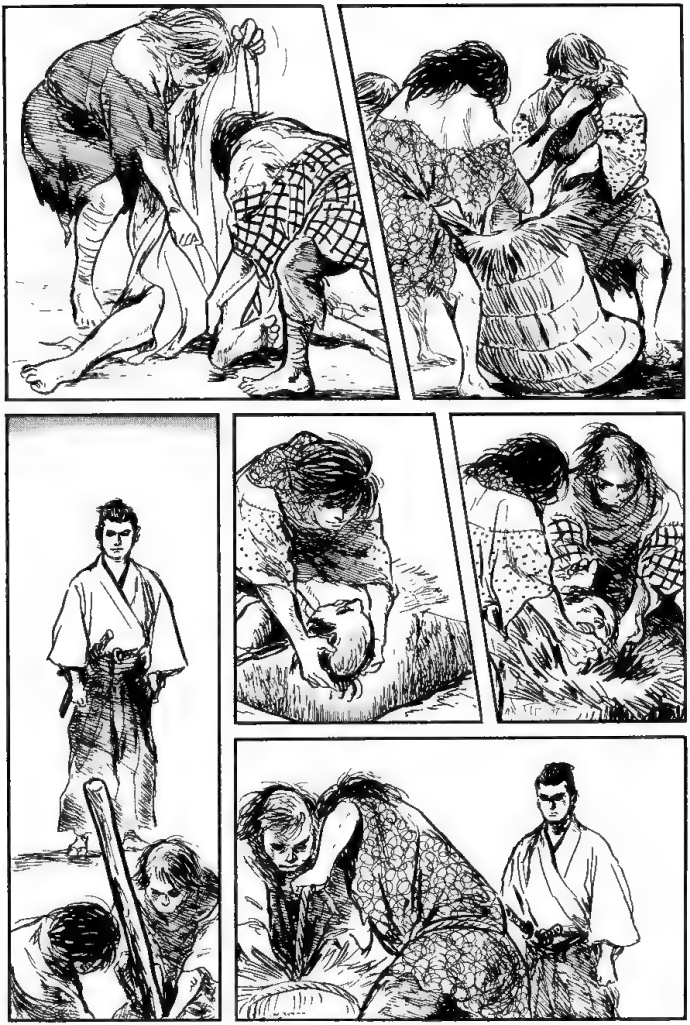
YOU MAY.
THANK YOU.
KLAPP

KLAPP
KLAPP

BRSSH

KLAP!

WHY...?!

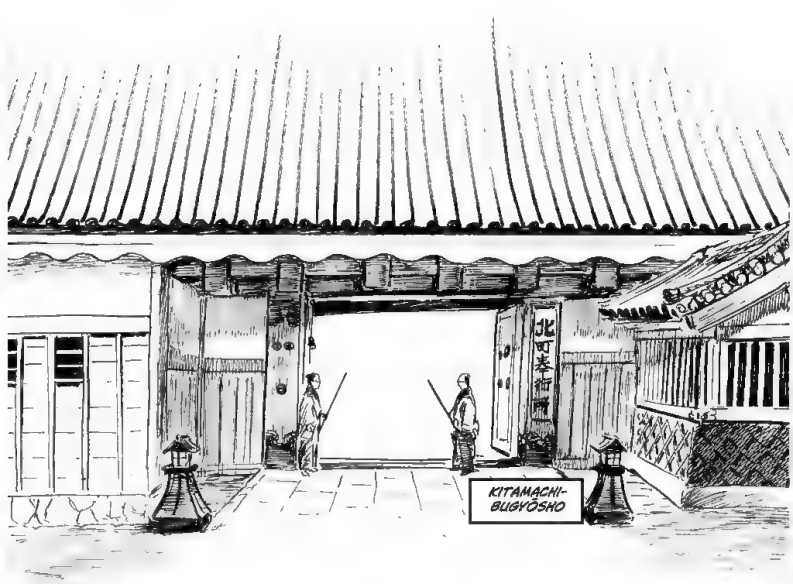


WHY...?

WHY...?

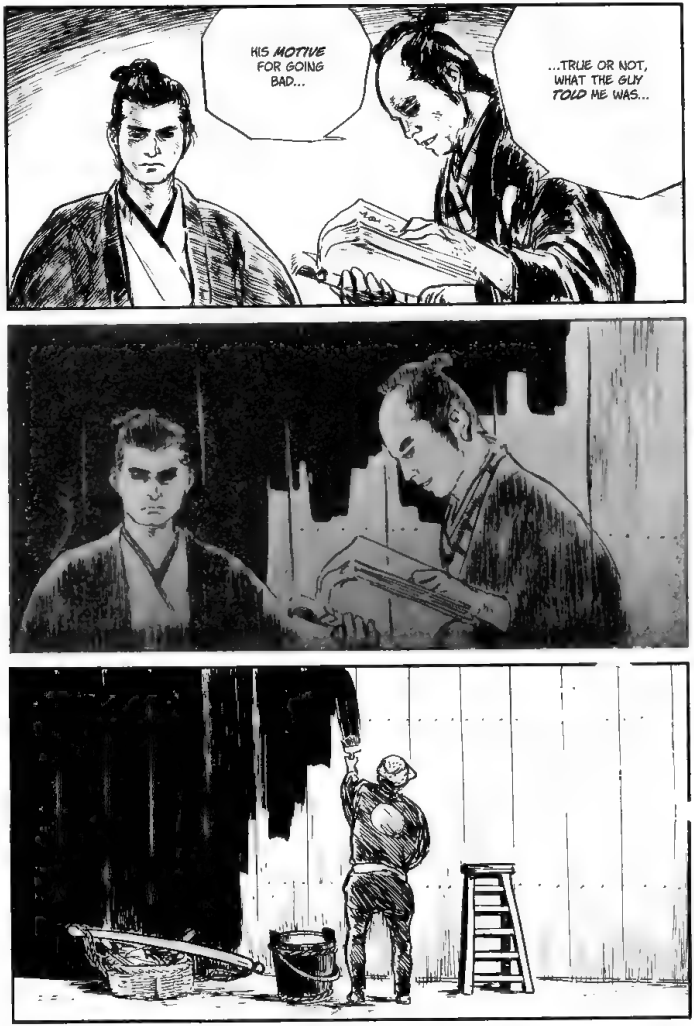
YAMADA-SAMA?
PLEASE CLAP KASHIWADE.
KASHIWADE?! YOU MEAN...?
MM!
KLAPP!
KLAPP!
KLAPP!

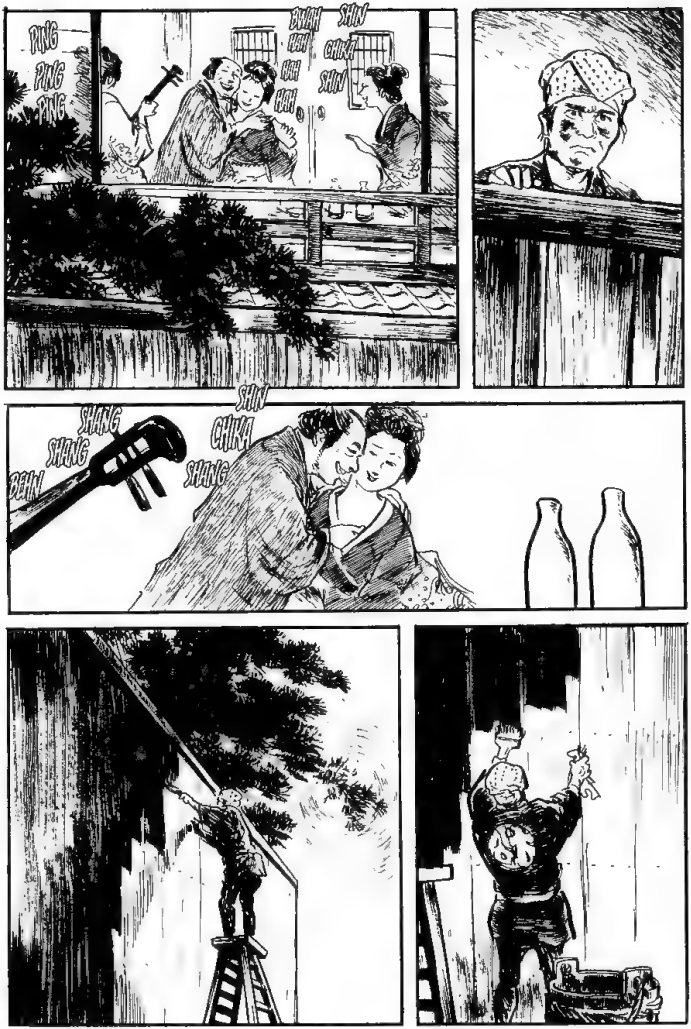
AGAIN.
KLAPP
KLAPP KLAPP
WE CLAP THREE TIMES BEFORE THE GODS. IF SOMEONE SAYS KASHIWADE, HE MEANS THREE.
BUT EVEN AS HIS HEAD FLEW, MATSUGORO CLAPPED FOUR. INCREDIBLE WILL!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY FOUR...?
WHO WAS HIS DŌSHIN?
KONDO YOSHICHI-SAMA, SIR.
KONDO-DONO...?


北町奉行所
KITAMACHI-BUGYŌSHO

同心詰所
DŌSHIN OFFICE

WALL PAINTER MATSUGORO, THIRTY-TWO. BORN IN KASAI.


HIS *MOTIVE* FOR GOING BAD...
...TRUE OR NOT, WHAT THE GUY *TOLD* ME WAS...


PING
PING
PING
BUHM
BUHM
BUHM
BUHM
SHIN
CHIKA
SHIN
SHANG
SHANG
BEHN
SHANG
SHIN
CHIKA

BEHN BEHN
BEHN BEHNNN
KYAH KAH HAH!

MATSUBARA
CHIKA TAITEN
YEAH! GO FOR IT!
SHI--! RICH BASTARDS.

SOMETHING WRONG?
N--NO, MA'AM.
FIGURED YOU'D CHECK MY WORK...
IT'S BLACK, ISN'T IT?
IT'S DARK NOW
I'LL LOOK IN THE MORNING.

RYŌGOKU
BRIDGE

THAT LIFE...
THIS LIFE...
DAMN IT ALLLL!!

IF WE ONLY GET ONE LIFE, I WANT TO LIVE BIG!
PAINT WALLS ALL MY LIFE?! I GOTTA BE CRAZY!
THERE YOU HAVE IT.
"THAT LIFE, THIS LIFE."
I KIND OF UNDERSTAND...
ANYWAY, TWO DAYS LATER...

HE BREAKS IN ON ISEYA RIHEI, DEALER IN FINE TEAS IN NIKUROMON-CHŌ.
HIS TAKE, SEVEN *RYŌ*, TWO *BUN*.
FIVE DAYS LATER, MISUMIYA TAHEI, THREAD WHOLESALER IN IKEHATA-NAKACHŌ.

TAKES TWENTY RYO. AND WOUNDS TAHEI AND HIS CLERK WHEN THEY RUN.
THEN, THE NEXT DAY...
...HE LIVES IT UP AT MATSUBARA. GETS DRUNK, AND WHAM.
CUTS UP MATSUE THE OKAMI REAL BAD. I NAB HIM.
CAN YOU GIVE MORE DETAILS?
WELL, MATSUGORO SHOWS UP IN A PALANQUIN.
HE'S DRESSED UP HEAD TO TOE IN FLASHY THREADS, BRAND NEW.

松原
MATSUBARA
松原

KUPP
KUPP

SHIP

SKRASH

YEEEK!
AAAA

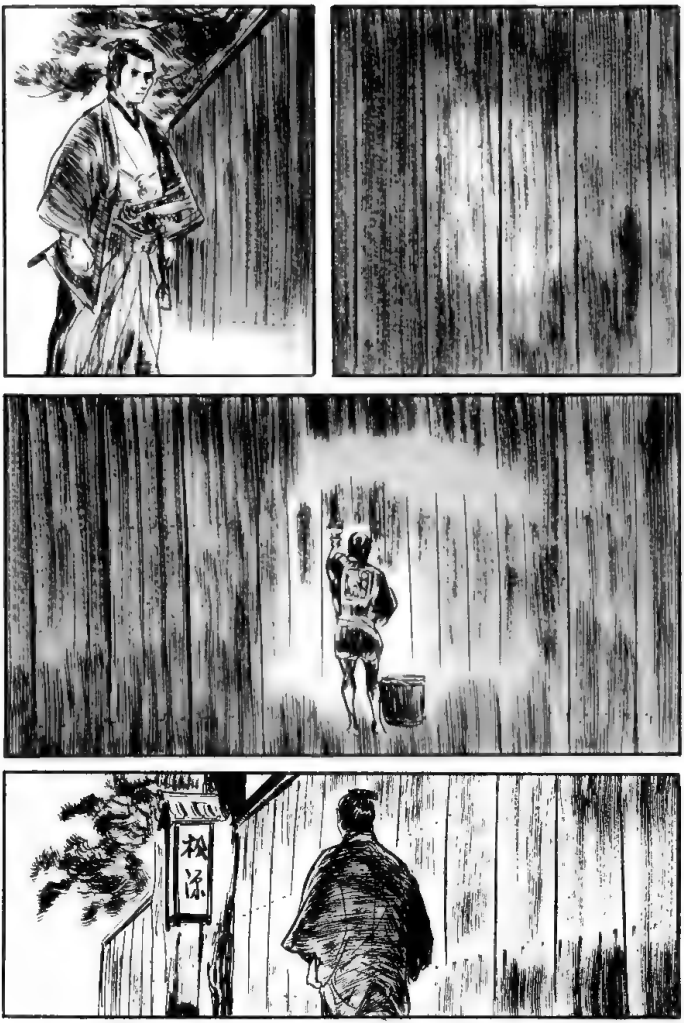
THAT'S THE WHOLE SORDID TALE. SEEMS MATSUGORO FELL FOR MATSUE WHEN HE PAINTED HER WALLS. THEN HE GETS HIS HANDS ON SOME CASH, WITH PREDICTABLE RESULTS.

IT MAKES NO SENSE.
PARDON?! WHAT DOESN'T?

YOU'RE SURE?
SAW THE CRIME SCENE, TALKED TO THE GALS.

YOU DIDN'T ASK THE OKAMI?

DIDN'T NEED TO.
SHE WAS HURT BAD.

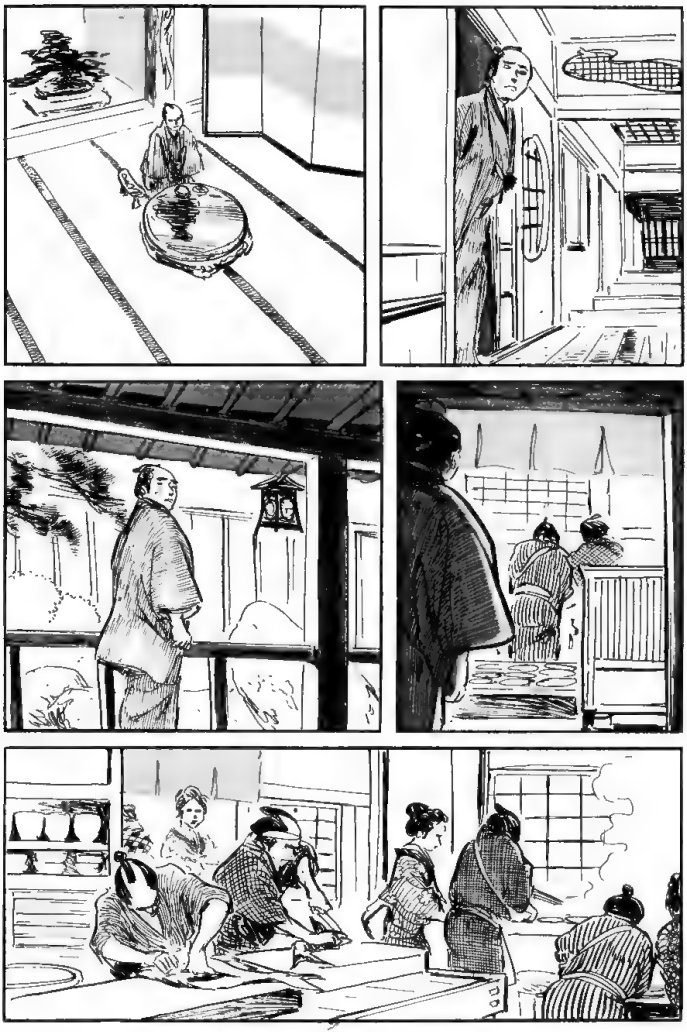

秋涼

I SEE... SO HE'S GONE ALREADY...
YOU DON'T YOU HATE HIM? ..
WHY SHOULD I? HE'S ATTONED FOR HIS SINS...
DID YOU NOTICE ANYTHING SPECIAL?
WHY? HE'S BEEN TRIED AND PUNISHED... WHY NOW?!

FOUR KASHIWADE... AT HIS EXECUTION...?
THE FOURTH AFTER DEATH.
HIS HANDS OBEYED HIS FIERCE WILL.
WE CLAP THRICE FOR KASHIWADE. WHY DID HE DELIBERATELY CLAP FOUR?
I'M HERE BECAUSE I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT KNOW.
IT WAS... THE SEVENTH HOUR.

UHM
UHM..
OH!
UH,
HI...!

GULP
TCH TCH
THIS CAN'T BE RIGHT.
TEA AND CAKES... THEN NOTHING. IT'S BEEN THIRTY MINUTES?!
THEY'RE DISRESPECTING ME?
KLAPP
KLAPP
KLAPP!



HE'S FROM THE COUNTRY, SO SPICE IT UP. QUICKLY!
DOIN' WHAT I CAN.
BUT OKAMI-SAN, HOW DO YOU KNOW?
HE CLAPPED THREE TIMES.
THAT'S KASHIWADE.
EDO FOLK CLAP TWICE.
DANG!

GLP!
GULP!
HIC

MINE!
MINE!!

OKAMI! SLEEP WITH ME!
I-I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU!
DON'T... JOKE, SIR...
NO JOKE!
MONEY?! I GOT MONEY!
HERE, HERE! IT'S ALL YOURS!
S-STOP! PLEASE!

GOD DAMN IT!!
EEEEEEEK
NO! DON'T!!

NOT EVEN IF I *PAY* YOU?!
YOU *PUT OUT* FOR *RICH CITY GUYS!*
BUT NOT *BUMPKINS*?!
'CUZ I'M NOT SOME *EDO PLAYBOY*?!
NO! IT'S NOT *THAT!* PLEASE...
I *HEARD* YOU! IN THE *KITCHEN!*
"*HE'S* FROM THE *COUNTRY!* *DON'T* GIVE'M *THAT!!*"

EDO GUYS CLAP TWICE. HE'S KASHIWADE!
I HEARD EVERY WORD, DAMN YOU!
YOU'RE WRONG!
IT'S NOT THAT!
THEN WHAT, HUH?
COUNTRY GENTLEMEN LIKE STRONG FLAVORS. I MADE HIM DO IT OVER!
I WASN'T MOCKING YOU, I SWEAR!
THAT'S WHY IT TOOK SO LONG!
IN OUR BUSINESS... WE CAN'T ASK OUR GUESTS DIRECTLY.

SO WE OBSERVE. CLOTHES...
THE WAY THEY CLAP... THAT'S HOW WE KNOW WHAT TO SERVE!
AND, AND I'M MARRIED. NOT FOR ANY PRICE...
I... I'VE DONE IT AGAIN...
AND THEN...
UNTIL THE DOSHIN CAME, HE JUST TALKED...
HOW HE ALWAYS "MESSED UP"...

MESSED UP?
WHATEVER HE TRIED, HE'D "MESS UP."
ANYTHING HE TRIED, HE'D MAKE SOME MISTAKE.
HIS BOSS WAS GOING TO MAKE HIM A PARTNER, BUT HE "MESSED UP"...
ONE EVEN KILLED HIS WIFE...
AND NOW HE'D GOTTEN AWAY WITH ALL THAT MONEY...
...BUT HE'D "MESSED UP" AGAIN. FOR GOOD...
"I'VE CLAPPED ONCE TOO OFTEN MY WHOLE LIFE," HE SAID. "IF THE NUMBER'S THREE, I'LL CLAP FOUR..."
AND THE FOURTH WOULD BE HIS RUIN...

"THREE CLAPS FOR KASHIWADE. FOUR CLAPS FOR DEATH..."
KLAPP
KLAPP
KLAPP

DASH!
KLAPP!!
FOUR CLAPS...
FOR DEATH.

GLOSSARY

bokujuya
A man who applies black paint to walls the way we whitewash walls in the West.

ebizume
The "shrimp torture." An early "stress position."

funai
The inner districts of Edo.

fusama
The sliding doors between rooms in a Japanese house. Often taken off their rails in summer to let the breeze through.

han
A feudal domain.

haru ichiban
The first strong winds of spring. Every year the gusts of *haru ichiban* are considered a sign of spring's arrival.

hibachi
Traditional fire urns for heating houses.

hitsuke tozoku aratame
Commonly abbreviated to *kato-aratame*. A special policing post dedicated to stopping arson and violent crime. Reports not to the *machi-bugyo*, but belongs to the *sakite-gumi*, a unit of warriors guarding Edo castle under the command of a *wakadoshiyori* counselor.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Samurai Executioner*:
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors

hyakubiroi
Literally, "picking up a hundred things." The ragman was one of the lowest of the low, living off the discarded junk of others.

kagebara
A particular form of *seppuku* to take responsibility for failure. The warrior makes the cut in secret, concealing it from others.

kappa
A water sprite.

kasa-bari
Making Japanese umbrellas from bamboo and paper. Under the strict caste system of the time, *bushi* were not allowed to work the fields like peasants, or go into business like commoners. Even a penniless *ronin* could only make money by making umbrellas or performing other menial tasks not subject to caste restrictions.

kashiwade
The traditional clap at Shinto shrines to call the attention of the gods.

mikan
A Japanese tangerine. Satsuma is one variety.

okami
The female owner of a restaurant or other establishment.

okashiratsuki
Fish prepared with the head left on. A delicacy.

Qu Yuan
Famed Chinese poet from 300 B.C. Raised in the imperial court, he is considered the first great poet in Chinese literature. He eventually drowned himself in the Milou River. The popular Dragonboat Races are held in his honor. *The Nine Songs* is considered one of his masterpieces.

rōnin
A masterless samurai. Literally, "one adrift on the waves." Members of the samurai caste who have lost their masters through the dissolution of *han*, expulsion for misbehavior, or other reasons. Prohibited from working as farmers or merchants under the strict Confucian caste system imposed by the Tokugawa shōgunate, many impoverished *rōnin* became "hired guns" for whom the code of the samurai was nothing but empty words.

udon
Japanese buckwheat noodles, and dishes using them.

Yoshiwara
The floating world of Edo's most famous pleasure quarters.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

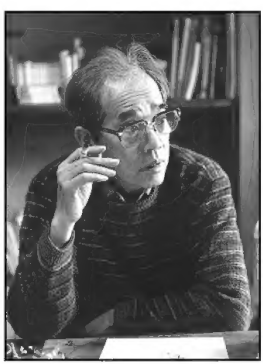
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami (Lone Wolf and Cub)*. Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner.*

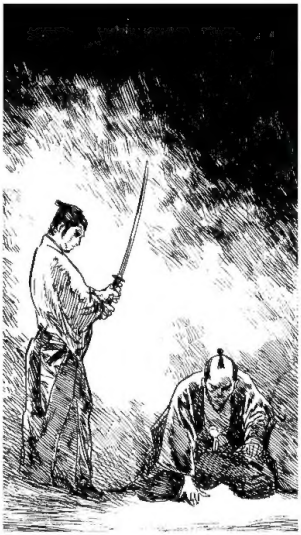
In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



Spring is a season of rebirth, or new life springing forth, a time of cherished blooming and delightful scents. But for Kubikira Asa, there is no spring delight. The Edo-era samurai crime drama by *Lone Wolf and Cub* creators Koike and Kojima continues down the path of heinous crime and diligent, bloody justice.

An ongoing story of daily political and social existence, *Samurai Executioner* is a work of graphic fiction written with historical precision and drafted by a true master of visual storytelling.

Published for the first time in America in the Japanese format.



Punished is not the man himself, but the evil that resides in him.

DARK HORSE MANGA

首斬り朝

FOR READERS 18+
FOR MATURE READERS